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A Terrible Price

A great victory has been achieved in Afghanistan. So it is said, even by people who previously doubted the wisdom of military intervention. The Taliban "government" has been overthrown and the bulk of their foreign supporters have been either killed or captured or chased out of Afghanistan.

It is true that at the time of writing very few senior Taliban figures have been caught, which is a source of great frustration to the American Government. It is also true that Osama Bin Laden remains at large but at least he and his al-Qaeda organisation can no longer operate freely in Afghanistan.

The "great victory" has been achieved with less than a dozen American dead. It has been easy. So easy that influential figures in the US administration are anxious to seize the moment to unmake other governments that are unfriendly to the US, specifically the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, which had nothing to do with the events of 11 September, but is one of the few states in the world that remains defiant in the face of American power.

On 20 December, 100 days after 11 September, the British Government published a bizarre self-congratulatory document entitled "**100 days, 100 ways**" (available from the Downing Street website). It ends with the bold statement:

"As a result of the action taken by the international coalition against terrorism, you and your family live in a safer world."

Tony Blair may live to regret that bold statement. He would do well to ponder the assessment of his Chief of Defence Staff, Sir Michael Boyce, a few days earlier:

"We must continue to focus on the enemy rather than on the ground taken; and we must be doubly careful not to identify our enemy just in the human form of UBL [Osama Bin Laden] - this is not a high

tech 21st century posse in the new Wild West. The immediate enemy is AQ [al-Qaeda] with its cells around the world, and its current capability. Through operations in Afghanistan we may - indeed, trust we will - disrupt and deter AQ from prosecuting its medium and long-term terrorist programme; but in the short term AQ remains a fielded, resourced, dedicated and essentially autonomous terrorist force, quite capable of atrocity on a comparable scale to what happened at the WTC and Pentagon." (Speech to Royal United Services Institute, 12 December)

UNREPORTED AND UNMOURNED

A terrible price has been paid for the "great victory". Not by America or Britain, nor by people with a responsibility for the attacks on America. It has been paid by Afghan civilians who had nothing to do with the events of 11 September, who did not choose to put the Taliban in power or to give Bin Laden and his friends a safe haven in Afghanistan.

Thousands of entirely innocent Afghans civilians have died. Their deaths have gone largely unreported in Western media and have been entirely unmourned by Western Governments. There will be no official two-minute silence in Britain for them, as there was for the dead in the World Trade Centre. There will be no state memorial service with the Queen and the rest of the great and the good in attendance. Tony Blair and his wife (along with her hairdresser) will not visit Afghanistan to tour the bombsites and weep for the cameras.

The usual response by the US Department of Defence to reports of civilian deaths has been to say that there is no independent confirmation and refuse to comment further. The usual response from Tony Blair and his ilk is to say that unlike the evil men who flew civilian aircraft into the twin towers we didn't mean to kill them. The truth is that civilian deaths were an inevitable consequence of the US bombing in Afghanistan, just as civilian deaths were an inevitable consequence of flying aircraft into the twin towers. So if there is a moral distinction it is not obvious.

The USAF may not have set out to flatten civilian areas of Kabul and other cities (as some of their current Afghan allies did ten years ago with artillery fire). But if targets in or near populated areas are selected for attack and large high explosive bombs are aimed at them then civilians will get killed. Bombs - even smart bombs - sometimes go astray and even if they hit their intended targets civilians nearby will get killed. And, of course, faulty intelligence may lead to civilian targets being attacked in the belief that they have military value.

One doesn't need to ascribe a malicious intention on the part of the US military to kill civilians to account for the civilian deaths that have occurred, merely, a fixed determination that the deaths of Afghan civilians are not going to stand in the way of the US reaching its military objectives.

WAR CRIMES IN OUR NAME

The recent bombings of villages in Pashtun areas in the south and east seem to be more directly aimed at civilians, the ambition being to get them to hand over Taliban figures in their midst and to discourage other villages from "harbouring" Taliban.

A report by Roy Carroll in the Guardian on 4 January about attempts to capture Mullah Omar was quite explicit about this. This quoted Nusrat Mullah, who was described as "an intelligence official" in Kandahar, saying that "the negotiations with those suspected of harbouring the cleric were galvanised yesterday by threats of US bombing if he was not handed over", and that "anti-Taliban leaders ... had told villagers to expect air strikes if the cleric was not handed over by tomorrow".

Collective punishment of civilians is a war crime, made all the worse by the fact that the Taliban aren't a threat to anybody any more. Yet this explicit threat to carry such an act is reported as an every day incident in a few lines on an inside page of the Guardian.

Had Slobodan Milosevic made clear his intention of wiping out Albanian villages in Kosovo unless they handed over KLA paramilitaries it is pound to a penny that it would have been on the front page of the Guardian, and politicians would be queuing up to

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condemn such a heinous practice and demand that he be tried for war crimes.

HOW MANY CIVILIANS DIED?

The number of Afghan civilians killed by the USAF will never be known, but by now it may well be in excess the number of civilians killed in New York and Washington on 11 September. This is now estimated at 3,234 compared with more than twice that number at one time. (The number of British victims that was originally said to be "hundreds" is now estimated to be about 60).

An American academic, Marc Herold, has published (on the internet at pubpages.unh.edu/~mwhero1d) an investigation of civilian casualties in Afghanistan from the start of the bombing on 7 October until 6 December. This is a well-documented account of bombing incidents that resulted in civilian

casualties, based on a wide range of reports from news agencies, newspapers, television, aid agencies, etc. He comes up with a figure of 3,767 civilian deaths for that period. And, of course, the killing of Afghan civilians has continued since 6 December.

(Herold reckons that his figure is a serious underestimate since he ignores bombing incidents for which no specific casualty figures have been reported - but only, for example, a statement that "dozens" of civilians had been killed - or for which no information at all is available.)

This seems to be an honest attempt to estimate the number of Afghan civilians killed, which puts to shame the Western media who have singularly failed to do this job. More coverage has been given in the British press to the deaths of a few US service men than to the deaths of thousands of innocent Afghan civilians. And the deaths of, perhaps, ten thousand Afghan and other combatants have hardly got a mention at all.

The Government's document "100 days, 100 ways" introduces itself as follows:

"To mark the 100 days since the international coalition began together to fight international terrorism following the attacks of September 11 a special document was published here in London listing 100 points concerning the momentous events since then".

In a list of the 10 momentous things that have changed in Afghanistan we learn that "football and games [sic] can be played" and "children can fly their kites", amongst other things. But the fact that thousands of Afghans who were alive on 7 October are now dead is not considered momentous enough to be worthy of mention. Nowhere in the bizarre document is there any mention of casualties, civilian or otherwise.

PRISONERS TORTURED

"Afghan jailers beat confessions from men" was the headline on an article by Rory Carroll in the Guardian on 28 December. It began:

"Afghanistan's new authorities are brutalising Taliban and al-Qaeda prisoners to soften them

up before handing them over to American forces. Guards admitted yesterday to the Guardian that they routinely tortured inmates to extract information, which was given to American officials trying to identify suspects to be prosecuted in the US.

"Beatings were an efficient and time-honoured method of persuading people to talk, they said. ...

"Talking to the Guardian, the governor of Kabul's so-called third directorate jail, Abdul Qayum, said of those held in his institution: 'At first we use Islamic and humanitarian behaviour towards them to get confessions, and if that doesn't work we use physical force.' ...

"That they possessed guns but not passports or identity documents was proof of al-Qaeda membership and confessions were needed to clinch their guilt, said Mr Qayum"

This is being done in our name by our allies in the "war against terrorism", yet not one voice of protest has been raised about it in Britain.

Rory Carroll's article quotes a US spokesman as saying on 21 December that American forces and their Afghan allies held about 7,000 "Taliban and al-Qaeda" prisoners in various jails, including a few on a US ship in the Arabian Sea (the American Taliban, John Walker, is held there). Most of the prisoners are under Northern Alliance control at present but it appears that they are all going to be handed over to the Americans. The expectation is that after interrogation some of these will be taken for trial in secret by US military courts at the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, which is being prepared for that purpose. Legal niceties are not a problem for the world's only superpower.

(There is no information about how many of these prisoners are non-Afghan. The US Government has successfully persuaded everybody to describe all non-Afghans captured as al-Qaeda, and therefore implicated in the events of 11 September - which means they can be wiped out at will. In fact the Taliban's main source of foreign foot soldiers in recent years has been the religious schools in Pakistan, and it is likely that most of the captured non-Afghans will be from Pakistan and have no association with al-Qaeda.)

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Editor
John Clayden

EXERCISED UNILATERALLY

Since 11 September we have witnessed a frightening demonstration of power by America, both military and economic, exercised with ruthless determination, and exercised unilaterally.

The greatest illusion of our time is that America is part of an international coalition fighting this war. Those like our Prime Minister who still believe in this illusion would profit from reading an article by Washington Post columnist, Charles Krauthammer, reproduced in the Guardian on 17 December. Here's a flavour of it:

"The whole idea that the Afghan war is being fought by 'coalition' is comical. ... The 'coalition' consists

of little more than US aircraft, US special forces and Afghan friends-of-the-moment on the ground. Like the Gulf war, the Afghan war is unilateralism dressed up as multilateralism. We made it plain that even if no one followed us, we would go it alone. Surprise: others followed.

"A unilateralist does not object to people joining our fight. He only objects when the multilateralists, like Clinton in Kosovo, give 18 countries veto power over bombing targets.

"The Afghan war is not a war run by committee. We made tough bilateral deals with useful neighbours: Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Russia. The Brits and the Australians added a sprinkling of guys on the ground risking their lives, and we will always be grateful for their solidarity. But everyone knows whose war it is.

"The result? The Taliban are destroyed. Al-Qaeda is on the run. Pakistan has made an historic pro-American strategic pivot, as have the former Soviet republics, even Russia itself. The Europeans are co-operating on prosecutions. Even the Arab states have muted their anti-American and anti-Israeli rhetoric ...

"Not because they love us. Not because we have embraced multilateralism. But because we have demonstrated astonishing military power and the will to defend vital American interests, unilaterally if necessary."

POUR ENCOURAGER LES AUTRES

On the face of it, the power exercised in Afghanistan is out of all proportion to the prize available there, since even if Bin Laden is killed or captured the al-Qaeda network will, in the words of Sir Michael Boyce, remain "a fielded, resourced, dedicated and essentially autonomous terrorist force".

But the demonstration of power is about matters beyond Afghanistan. It is about showing any other state which dares give house room to anti-American paramilitary groups that by doing so it

leaves itself open to awful consequences, that America has immense military power and that, under this administration, the will to exercise it.

In this respect also, America's campaign appears to be working: in his speech to the Royal United Services Institute on 12 December, Sir Michael Boyce remarked:

"One thing that has become clear is that military actions have had a beneficial effect on the behaviour of potential sponsor states such as Yemen, Sudan and Syria."

Precisely what "beneficial effect" has been obtained where is not clear. But, if Simon Tisdall (Guardian, 7 December) is to be believed, Yemen has come onside rapidly, and whereas it was less than co-operative during the investigation of the attack on the USS Cole, it is now co-operating fully with the US against al-Qaeda. Yemen's president, Ali Abdullah Salih, visited the US recently and was received in the White House. To sweeten the pill, US is said to be providing a range of financial incentives.

In its continuing war against al-Qaeda, America will act mainly by non-military means like this. Now that it has demonstrated its willingness to use military force ruthlessly, it will have less need to do so again.

IRAQI EXCEPTION

The exception may be Iraq. That is not to say that Iraq has assisted al-Qaeda. If there was any substantial evidence of this, those in the Bush administration, who believe that now is the time to finish the unfinished business of the last Bush administration and topple Saddam Hussein, would be shouting it from the rooftops. They are not doing so.

This doesn't mean that Iraq will not be in the firing line eventually. But if there is no proven link with al-Qaeda the justification is less substantial. This is a consideration since the military task is much more difficult than toppling the Taliban, and American casualties are therefore likely to be much greater. And the side effects of going to war with Iraq could be very damaging for the US economy, relying as it does on Arab oil, including Iraqi oil.

Bevin Society Meetings

Bevin Society/Labour & Trade Union Review: Next Open Meeting, Wednesday, 6th February, 7.30 pm

Discussion on political issue of the day

at the Printer's Room, Red Rose Club, Seven Sisters Road, London, N7.
Nearest Tube: Finsbury Park. Buses: 4, 29, 153, 253, 259, 279.

all welcome

Report From Serbia

Dragos Kalajic

Dragos Kalajic is a painter whose work has been exhibited in Yugoslavia and abroad. He is a member of the Artists Association of Serbia and has received a number of awards for his work. Mr Kalajic is also a member of the Russian Writers Association and the Serbian Literary Association. He lives and works in Belgrade as a writer and political commentator. His works include The Last European, a novel published earlier this year. He is a co-founder of the Belgrade Forum, and the chief editor of its publication. Dragos Kalajic is a senator of the Republika Srpska. He has never been a member of any political party.

The follow text is of the address delivered by Mr Kalajic at a Committee for Peace in the Balkans Public Seminar on Tuesday 23 October 2001, in the British Parliament

I would like to thank the Committee for Peace in the Balkans for inviting me to address you here in the building of the British Parliament on the issue of Yugoslavia and the International Community. I will provide a Serbian viewpoint of the present situation in my native country and its position within the wider European context.

I regard my own and my people's homeland to be bigger and wider than the present Yugoslavia reduced, as it is, to just two republics.

To start with the communist administration of Marshal Tito decided to break Serbian territory into several pieces and divide the Serbian people into several different administrative units, which we refer to as republics. The purpose was to disable a possible uprising of a nation that had demonstrated the

high value it places on its freedom and independence from foreign rule.

When in the 1990s the secessionist crisis broke out, the European Community was quick to offer its mediating services, but soon, it itself, became an important party taking sides in the Yugoslav conflict. Flying in the face of the important Helsinki Final Act, the European Community openly promoted and legalized secessions achieved through violence. It also rewarded the parties that had acted against Yugoslavia's own constitution by wanting to secede from the common Yugoslav state and in the process incorporate Serbian inhabited territories. At the same it was punishing all those citizens and entire populations who wanted to remain within the state to which they had sworn allegiance.

The consequences of this approach, initially promoted by the European Community and later even more forcibly by the United States, were long drawn out wars with a substantial number of victims. Over four hundred thousand Serbs were forced to flee Western-backed Croatia into the sanctions devastated Yugoslavia, now reduced to the republics of Serbia and Montenegro.

To-day the Serbian Republic within Bosnia and Hercegovina is under colonial administration of the, so-called "International Community" - a pseudonym for Washington's essentially anti-European policies. This administration is taking away from Serbian population, day by day, all the rights, acquired via the signed Dayton agreement.

Kosovo and Metohija, an integral

region of Serbia, is today under the occupation of the same "International Community". Its representatives are openly supporting the persecution and everyday killing of ethnic Serbs in the region. They are promoting and legitimising the creation of a second Albanian state in the region, contrary to the regulations of the Resolution of Security Council of the U.N.

Today, this new Albanian parastate has already become a leading station on the heroin path leading from the Middle East to Europe. Mr. Tony Blair now reveals that 98% of the heroin in Europe comes from Afghanistan. He should also know that the same heroin is being distributed within Europe via Albanian secessionists and terrorists with the help and connivance of the so-called Peace forces of the "International Community".

A year ago, the so-called democratic opposition claimed victory in the elections in Serbia, because the politics, pursued by Mr. Slobodan Milosevic, suffered a defeat. There are three main reasons for this defeat.

The first is a moral one. The political elite could not cope with the changing attitudes. The second reason is psychological: after ten years of sanctions and dramatic falls in living standards, aggression and resistance against an immensely more powerful foreign opponent, people were overcome with resignation.

The third reason is political: the opposition succeeded in persuading the majority of the people that the only way for the hostility of the International Community towards Serbia to end would be by removal or sidelining of president

Slobodan Milosevic. The opposition carried the message from Washington: a series of promises that the changes at the top would be rewarded not only with eternal friendship, but also with necessary investments for the reconstruction of a country whose infrastructure had been decimated by Nato's bombs. It also convinced the people that Albanian secessionism and terrorism would vanish simultaneously with the disappearance of the only stumbling block - Slobodan Milosevic.

Today, a year later, the present situation is much worse in all the aspects. All the negative tendencies are getting stronger. Parliamentary democracy has become a nonsense with the appearance of the new restrictive rules. Discussions concerning the introduction of new laws are now limited to the duration of five hours, at the most! The Speaker in the Parliament has a discretionary right not only to punish all the orators whom he deems to have acted without political correctness, but has also to take away their salaries.

The International Monetary Fund is forcing the pace of reforms which have proved, all over the world, to be excellent and effective tools for the destruction of national economies. The next thing coming is the adoption of a labour resolution which will destroy all workers rights. Instead of going forward, Yugoslavia is falling into a savage and brutal capitalism of the nineteenth century. Marxist theory has become more current than ever.

Coming up, also, is a violent form of privatisation, to be more exact - the seizure of the most successful factories, industries and enterprises from their real owners - i.e. the workers. All public property, acquired and generated by hard work over a number of generations, can, with a single unconstitutional resolution, be declared to be the property of the State. And now, our new political elites are preparing to sell everything for nothing.

But the promoter of the hostility among the power centers is still there. Yugoslavia is still the main area for the most important, real or virtual, river and land communications between Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia.

To summarise, the US strategy aims to place territories under effective US control, so that they can be used to control Europe's direct access towards its most important energy sources. This control has been achieved through the generation of conflicts, or to use the apparently more acceptable term, through "crisis management".

Thanks to the written confession of Michael Lind and Jacob Heilbrunn published on 4th January 1996, Washington is creating "The third American Empire" on the territory of the former Ottoman Empire. The third American Empire should serve as the only path for the permanent invasion of the hungry and the desperate immigrant masses of the Third World into the European Community, so as to accomplish through demographic changes, the destabilisation and weakening of Europe. Yugoslavia is the most important battlefield of the undeclared war of the American financial power centres against Europe.

What could the European Union do to defend its interests? In the perspective of the emancipation of Europe from the Atlantic Leviathan, the European states should organize a Peace Conference for the Balkans.

The first goal: reaffirmation of the principles of the Helsinki Charter, to be more exact, the inviolability of existing borders. The second goal: the affirmation of the principles of non-interference in the affairs concerning Balkan state relations. Historic experiences has shown beyond doubt, that it is the interferences of foreign powers in the region that have been the main cause of instability and armed conflicts in Yugoslavia and the Balkans.

I thank you for your attention, and I am waiting to deal with your questions.

The Committee for Peace in the Balkans was established in 1993, in response to the crisis in Yugoslavia. It is chaired by Alice Mahon, UK Labour MP, member of the North Atlantic Assembly and Chair of the Committee for Security and Cooperation in South East Europe.

Public Seminar Series III
Seminar on Tuesday 29th January 2002

The Politics of Oil
Alice Mahon MP with Peter Gowan, New Left Review, on the links between US policy and the development of the Caspian oil pipeline.

7pm in House of Commons, London SW1

For further details, contact the Committee for Peace in the Balkans
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Nation-Building

David Morrison

"NATION-BUILDING" IN AFGHANISTAN

On 5 December at the end of conference held under the auspices of the United Nations Afghan representatives signed the Bonn Agreement. Amongst other things this established a 30-strong Interim Administration for Afghanistan, which assumed power on 22 December.

The pre-amble to the Agreement contains a tribute to the liberators of Afghanistan from Soviet rule:

"Expressing their appreciation to the Afghan mujahidin who, over the years, have defended the independence, territorial integrity and national unity of the country and have played a major role in the struggle against terrorism and oppression, and whose sacrifice has now made them both heroes of jihad and champions of peace, stability and reconstruction of their beloved homeland, Afghanistan"

This is not surprising since the Interim Administration is made up, broadly speaking, of the groups which, aided by the US and Saudi Arabia (and with foreign volunteers such as Osama Bin Laden), forced the Soviet Union to withdraw in 1989, but which then engaged in internecine warfare as a result of which tens of thousands of civilians in Kabul were killed by artillery fire. It was their failure to end disorder and anarchy that paved the way for the emergence of the Taliban in 1994. It doesn't bode well for the success of the new administration.

The Bonn Agreement, like others of its kind, contains a fulsome commitment to respect human rights. One of the duties of the Interim Administration under it is to establish "an independent Human Rights Commission" (Paragraph C6). Not only that, the UN is given the authority under the Agreement to investigate "human rights violations"

(Annex II, Paragraph 6). But this hasn't stopped Taliban prisoners being tortured in Kabul prisons by agents of the new administration.

A LITTLE PERSPECTIVE

To justify its overthrow, the Taliban regime has been painted as irredeemably evil of late and a veil has been drawn over the behaviour of the mujahidin groups which preceded it, and are now scheduled to succeed it. The following letter from Stuart Worsley published in the Guardian on 26 November adds a little perspective:

"I was an aid worker in Afghanistan for five years till August. The Taliban's harsh policies cannot be defended. But it was possible to work around them."

"My agency supported some 150 local community schools, where over 6,400 girls attended classes daily, which employed 70 women and provided direct assistance to some 9,000 women-headed households. It was no utopia, but neither was it total hell."

"Replacing Taliban with the Northern Alliance is a return to the hell of 1993, when bandits ruled and Amnesty slated the government as targeting women for 'assassination, abduction and rape ... to terrorise the civilian population in order to secure and reinforce their power base'. In the last week, we have seen insecurity spread. Aid agencies can no longer rely on secure access for supplies or personnel - and aid is becoming more difficult than ever to deliver."

TAJIK WINNERS

The 30-strong Interim Administration was put together by the West with some difficulty at Bonn. As usual in these matters, a large bribe - £4bn in Western aid - was on offer if agreement was reached. The difficulty was securing agreement on the shareout of posts in the administration between the ethnic groups and the role if any for

an international peace keeping force.

The Chairman of the Interim Administration is Pashtun, Hamid Karzai, but the winners in the shareout have been the Northern Alliance, specifically, the Tajik part of it from north-east Afghanistan, formerly led by Ahmed Shah Massoud (he was assassinated on 9 September). They came away from Bonn with the three most important posts in the Interim Administration: Foreign Affairs (Dr. Abdullah Abdullah), Defence (Muhammad Qassem Fahim) and the Interior (Muhammad Yunus Qanooni). This success is hardly unrelated to the fact that, thanks to US air power, their forces now occupy Kabul, something they failed to achieve in the struggles of the early 1990s.

Of course, the Interim Administration has few of the attributes of a government, apart from occupying Afghanistan's seat at the UN. There is little in the way of a civil service and no unified army or police. Power lies with local armed groups.

WITHDRAWAL PROMISED

Under Annex I, Paragraph 4 of the Bonn Agreement, the Northern Alliance promised to withdraw their forces from Kabul and allow them to be replaced by an international force:

"The participants in the UN Talks on Afghanistan pledge to withdraw all military units from Kabul and other urban centers or other areas in which the UN mandated force is deployed."

It makes no sense that the Northern Alliance should withdraw their forces, and throw away what is their trump card, not least when nobody is in a position to make them withdraw.

It is clear that at Bonn and subsequently there has been a lot wrangling about whether there should

be an international force and what its role should be, with the Northern Alliance wanting none of it, since they have no wish to see their grip on Kabul weakened.

Annex I of the Agreement specifies a minor role for an outside force, which can only have come about because resistance from the Afghan representatives at Bonn. Paragraph 1 acknowledges that "the responsibility for providing security and law and order throughout the country resides with the Afghans themselves". In Paragraph 2 the Afghan representatives request outside help "in the establishment and training of new Afghan security and armed forces".

Paragraph 3 is the important one: "Conscious that some time may be required for the new Afghan security and armed forces to be fully constituted and functioning, the participants in the UN Talks on Afghanistan request the United Nations Security Council to consider authorizing the early deployment to Afghanistan of a United Nations mandated force. This force will assist in the maintenance of security for Kabul and its surrounding areas. Such a force could, as appropriate, be progressively expanded to other urban centres and other areas."

UN MANDATED FORCE

The UN Security Council duly passed Resolution 1386 on 20 December which authorizes "the establishment for 6 months of an International Security Assistance Force to assist the Afghan Interim Authority in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding areas, so that the Afghan Interim Authority as well as the personnel of the United Nations can operate in a secure environment".

Despite the objections of the Northern Alliance, it is a Chapter VII resolution, which means that force could in theory be used, for example, to disarm Northern Alliance troops. (The resolution asserts that "the situation in Afghanistan still constitutes a threat to international peace and security", which allows Chapter VII to be invoked).

The resolution also endorsed Britain's offer to take the lead in organising and commanding the force,

initially for 3 months. This has meant protracted negotiations about the size of the force and its rules of operation between the British commander of the ISAF, Major-General John McColl, and the Tajik Interior Minister, Yunus Qanooni, the latter wishing to keep the size and role of the force to a minimum.

NO WITHDRAWAL

It now looks as if the Interior Minister has won hands down. There are to be only 4,500 troops deployed in Kabul (compared with 50,000 deployed across Kosovo). What is more, instead of the Northern Alliance withdrawing their forces from Kabul as required by the Bonn Agreement (and repeated in the Security Council resolution), the ISAF will patrol jointly with the Northern Alliance forces. According to a report by Rory Carroll in the Guardian on 1 January:

"UN-mandated peacekeepers would keep a low profile and not challenge the authority of the Northern Alliance during joint patrols or checkpoints."

What was originally envisaged by Tony Blair as a mighty exercise in "nation-building", the first step in his re-ordering of the world, has been reduced to a few patrols in Kabul (which is probably the safest place in Afghanistan) alongside the Northern Alliance. After British Royal Marines staged their first joint patrol with the Northern Alliance on 30 December, Rory Carroll wrote:

"Afghans watching the patrol were bemused that foreign troops were patrolling the capital, which is safe, rather than the country roads which have become infested with bandits." (Guardian, 31 December)

UNLIKELY ALLIES

In their resistance to substantial British troop deployment in Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance had unlikely allies in the form of the British military establishment and the Conservative Party.

In what was clearly an organised move, four former Chiefs of the Defence Staff used a debate on Afghanistan on 17 December to express fears about Britain undertaking an ill-defined, and possibly unlimited, role in Afghanistan, particularly in the light of other commitments.

One of them, Lord Bramall, said:

"... having been so successful so far I... hope that we do not spoil it by forcing formed bodies of British troops on to reluctant Afghans, to do heaven knows what for heaven knows how long. It would surely be tactless to those who have done the lion's share of the fighting; their precise task would seem still to be obscure; and, as the realities of non-Muslim forces getting involved in internal domestic power struggles and squabbles sinks in, their safety could become increasingly precarious."

"Such deployment would also significantly increase overstretch and it is highly doubtful whether the necessary support services, not least the medical services, could be provided without irreparable damage being done elsewhere. For all those reasons it must surely be contrary to military advice. But if I am wrong about that no doubt the Minister will correct me. Only in the context of humanitarian aid under UN mandate could an intervention such as this be seen to be justified."

There can be little doubt that Lord Bramall and his colleagues were speaking for the present military leadership, who are trying to rein in Blair's international ambitions and bring home to him what is practical and what is not with Britain's present military resources.

The end result is that only 1,500 British troops (out of the total of 4,500) will be deployed and they will be under strict instructions to be nice to Northern Alliance soldiers, whom they were originally supposed to replace.

NEXT STEPS

The Interim Administration is now officially in operation. But this is only the beginning. By 22 January a special commission is to be set up to decide how to allocate seats at an Emergency Loya Jirga, including seats to Afghans living abroad. The Emergency Loya Jirga is to be convened by 22 June this year. Its job is to establish a Transitional Administration to replace the present interim one and to act as the Government of Afghanistan until elections are held. Under the Agreement these have to be held by 22 June 2004. But first a constitution has to be drawn up by a

Constitutional Loya Jirga, which is to be convened within 18 months of the establishment of the Transitional Administration.

If this all works, it will be a miracle. With its multiplicity of ethnic groups, and continuing interference by neighbouring states on behalf of these ethnic groups, the chances of there ever being a functional government in Afghanistan whose writ runs throughout the land are slim. The best chance it had for becoming a functional state was under Soviet rule, but that chance is gone.

It is hard to see how it can exist as a state without being run by some outside agency with many thousands of troops at

its disposal, as the UN runs Bosnia. In the flush of victory over the Taliban, it seemed that was what Tony Blair had in mind. But when the US made it clear that they would not provide large numbers of ground troops for "nation-building" in Afghanistan - "Superpowers don't do dishes" was the phrase coming out of Washington - this option disappeared.

BREAKING UP

Ironically, amongst Foreign Office documents released by the Public Record Office at the New Year there was a note by the British Ambassador in Kabul 50 years ago suggesting that Afghanistan be abolished as a state and split between Pakistan and the Soviet Union. The Pashtun region in the south going to

Pakistan, thereby allowing them join up with their fellow Pashtuns in Pakistan.

A division of Afghanistan today would be more complicated. To allow the various ethnic groups to join up as far as possible with their fellows in neighbouring states, each of the three former Soviet republics to the north (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), and Iran to the west, would have to each get a piece of territory, as well as Pakistan. The chief objector to this would of course be India, which would be strongly opposed to the expansion of Pakistan. Perhaps, India could be bought off with a very favourable settlement in respect of Kashmir.

Notes On The News

Gwydion M. Williams

Dust Of Afghanistan

Within three months of the dramatic strike at the Pentagon and World Trade Centre, the Afghan forces of the Taliban and al Qaeda were no more than dust blowing in the wind. I'd expected it to happen eventually and said so

"By the strict forms of law, maybe bin Laden could not have been found legally guilty for killings that he undoubtedly inspired. The actual perpetrators were already dead, by their own choice. A guilty party was needed, the USA is determined on vengeance, and presumably will get it." (Problems of Socialism & Capitalism, Issue 66)

The quick and sudden collapse of Taliban power surprised everyone, but was a rational response by them to a war that was unwinnable in the long run. Meantime the Afghan forces of al Qaeda were clearly caught napping. I'd felt for years that Islamic extremism was no substitute for Socialism or Communism as a global opposition to US power.

The USA had found a cynically successful approach, pursue your quarrel on Afghan territory, using local quarrels and with copious bribery, and without any ambition to improve Afghans or give them good government. That's not to say it was safe, regardless. With Russian Roulette, you'd get away with it just over 83% of instances, which hardly makes it safe. And the USA played and won its game of 'Afghan Roulette' without obvious disaster. Why not?

The USA has industrialised violence, following a tradition that began with their own wars against Native Americans and then the Union crushing of the much more skilful Confederate armies. Warfare need not be done well or destructively, just persistently and on a massive scale. The tradition of General Sherman is alive and well.

Propaganda, meantime, remains crude. The USA has got away with 'Pre-emptive Self Defence', going after people who might be a menace if you don't get them first. In the aftermath of

10,000 highly visible deaths, they got away with it, even though the concept of 'self-defence' was thereby stripped of any meaning. At best you could call it 'justified aggression'. And meantime the death-toll has come down from the almost obligatory 6,000 to about 3000, perhaps less deaths than the US has caused with an Afghan war than did not touch the really dangerous element, disaffected Muslims living within Western societies (including the recent bizarre shoe-bomber).

I continue to regard it as basically a war of revenge. The role of oil and the possible Afghan pipeline can be overstated. Central Asian reserves are large, but also expensive to get out of the ground, never mind get to market. The Gulf has the great merit of oil that costs a dollar a barrel to get out of the ground and is right next to the sea, where oil tankers can ship it wherever it may be sold. So, to the USA, it doesn't greatly matter if Afghanistan slips back into chaos.

The big winner so far has been Russia, with its dominance of Central Asia confirmed with US approval. I stand by my suspicions that some ex-Soviet element was involved behind the scenes in making Bin Laden's people look briefly formidable

New Labour In Vain

Britain under Blair made itself foolish by its eagerness to rush in peace-keepers and ensure that Afghans become 'normal people'. The vast majority of Afghans are not 'normal people' in the sense that Blair and New Labour would understand it, and would fiercely resist the prospect. It was their own completely different sense of 'normality' that they suffered and died for: what else was the anti-Soviet war was about, after all? Whatever there was in Afghanistan that might have seemed normal to New Labour perished or became marginal in that struggle.

The initial deployment was a folly that nearly became a disaster. The Special Boat Service are damn good, said to be even better than the SAS. But it's not a good strategy to have a bare hundred of them occupying all of the low ground amidst thousands of battle-hardened Tajiks with a nice mix of infantry, armour and artillery.

We are now to have 'peacekeepers' led by Britain, but limited in number and with the intention of rotating them out after maybe six months (just about when they'd have acclimatised and be at their most useful, if there was anything real for them to do). Curiouser and curiouser, one might say.

What I suspect has happened is that the Afghan faction leaders have accepted that Britain must be allowed to 'save face' by playing at peace-keeping for a few months, and that any planned civil wars should be postponed for at least that long.

In case any Afghan hasn't got the message, we have Mr Ian Duncan Smith saying plainly that he doesn't want the peacekeepers there at all. That's the sort of thing that Afghans will hear about on the BBC World Service and see in its proper context, the British also are just

passing through.

Meantime, I wonder what would happen if a self-appointed committee of Afghan tribal elders flew into Heathrow, offering to mediate between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, along with any of their cabinet colleagues they might happen to fall out with?

The Clearance Of Canaan

Hard-line Islam has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. It gave coherence to Iran, but Iranian identity is very old indeed, vastly older than any surviving nation in Europe and likely to cohere one way or another. A people who maintain an historic hostility to Alexander the Great regardless of the views of their neighbours are always likely to cohere.

Afghans behaved as tribalists, Arabs and other Muslims remain divided and weak. Almost anything is possible for the West and its allies in the short term.

Israelis saw no need to moderate their policies during the Afghan War. A simple cutting off of aid and support from the USA would put intolerable pressure on them. But they act on the belief that there is not the slightest danger of any US president putting intolerable pressure on them. And so far they've been quite right.

Pro-American Arabs have been treated with contempt over the last few months. Israel is intentionally destroying the authority of Arafat, the one leader who could deliver a peace that most Arabs and Muslims would regard as fair.

There is peace made with Arafat, or there is no peace with Islam. The way things have gone, it seems more accurate to say simply 'there is no peace with Islam'.

Israel is only safe when the Islamic world as a whole accepts it. This was happening with the decline of secular nationalism. Weak Muslim rulers would accept Israel as it was in 1968, and maybe a bit extra, if the Palestinians would accept it.

What is not acceptable is Israel in full control of Jerusalem, and

increasingly absorbing the West Bank (Judea and Samaria), a wholesale clearance of ancient Canaan of non-Jewish elements. Yet undermining Arafat makes no sort of sense unless that is the long-term goal.

One billion Muslims will never accept it. And the more things drift that way, the more the hard-liners will be vindicated and the pro-Western and moderate elements discredited. Some sorts of hard-liner may also get discredited, as with the Taliban, but one billion people who have not been given a culture they can happily live within will not remain incoherent for ever.

There is still a window of opportunity, but it's closing.

'Hooding Rob' and Argentina

The whole 'Feed The Rich' policy of the 1980s and 1990s was a blatant untruth. Giving more to the rich was nice for the rich and did no good for the rest of the society. 'Trickle down' never happened. 'Hooding Rob', take from the poor and give to the rich, on the promise that the poor will eventually benefit. Maybe its advocates believed their own nonsense, as with characters like Jeffrey Archer, but how can anyone else still believe it?

With the Argentine default, it's clear that a lot of the mainstream media know it is nonsense and see that it was crazy to ask the rulers of Argentina to squeeze needy people so as to keep up their debt repayments.

Let's be clear. The Keynesian semi-capitalist system won the Cold War. Khrushchev tried to build an alternative semi-capitalist system, in which private enterprise would remain banned but the infinite perfection of market systems would improve the stodgy Stalinist system. Yet the stodgy Stalinist system had worked, while Khrushchev's radical reforms were foolish and were the start of a long decline. This is different from China, where they moved from a fairly successful Maoist Communism to a very successful semi-capitalist system under Deng and Jiang.

Even if richer rich made for faster growth, the benefits would be moot. A

smaller slice of a larger cake may not be a good deal, and a larger slice of a smaller cake could be a profitable deal, though selfish. 8% of 100 is a worse deal than 10% of 90, and a better deal than 6% of 120. And while the policies of the last two decades have not benefited the society as a whole, the richest 10% have flourished wonderfully.

The erosion of visible class barriers makes this harder to see. When it's 'them and us', it's easy to know where your best interests lie. But what about when it's 'us and super-us', with even the poor supposing that they are only accidentally poor and will eventually find their proper place among the rich and successful? 90% of the USA has accepted an unchanging share of an ever-growing cake and are no better off than they were in the 1970s.

Britons, without Eternal Sacred Rights from a written constitution, are not such mugs and have mostly done OK. But even in Britain, the 'us and super-us' ideology is growing now that the old ruling class have lost their privileged slots.

Greater Need Hath The Greedy

"The poor are more generous than the rich when it comes to giving to good causes, according to research which challenges the 'Robin Hood' myth of charity as an agent of redistribution.

"A study published today finds that the least well-off give a higher proportion of their income to charity than the wealthy, no matter what their age, class or beliefs...

"The report, titled *The Widow's Might*: how charities depend on the poor, also argues that charities are not necessarily the engines of redistribution from rich to poor that they are widely believed to be.

"The general trend of the poor giving more also remains true among donors who describe themselves as religious, although believers on middle incomes give a significantly higher share of their income than those who do not call themselves religious." (Guardian, Friday December 21, 2001)

The House Of Obedience

The House Of Commons has long

been the arena of party struggle, with individual MPs counting for little. The advantage of the House Of Lords was that people with a job for life have little to gain or lose and can act according to their conscience.

Getting rid of the hereditary peers was no bad thing, it also gave the slimmed-down Lords more moral authority in rejecting government policies.

A 'reformed' House Of Lords has now been proposed, to be dominated by appointees who are dependent on current leaders and must look to their future. Now this would be a step down, much worse than the historic oddity we have now.

Unfortunately we are up against the dogma that free votes must of necessity give people exactly the government they want. Never mind that it fails to work in practice, the sacred principle must be upheld.

Weaving The Web.

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

Major Street ("I.O."): The Administration Of Ireland (1920) and other writings

Introduction by Pat Walsh. £12 postfree

In 1920 it must have been inconceivable to British governing circles, and British public opinion in general, that Britain could 'lose' Ireland. Large additions had recently been made to the Empire by victory in the Great War. Imperial glory was at its height. And the possibility that the Empire should begin to unravel so close to home was not to be entertained. And so, when England's oldest colony—the other green and pleasant land which had so often been conquered and so often been declared to be irrevocably British—voted to be independent in the 1918 General Election, the British Parliament and Government decided to take no notice of the vote.

Major Street was part of the mighty military machine that had just won the greatest war in history and that was now

deployed in support of the British Administration of Ireland against the will of the Irish electorate. He had specialised in Intelligence and Propaganda in the World War, and he was now deputed to provide propaganda legitimacy for the Black-and-Tan War.

The book he produced is of interest as a coherent statement of the British case, published while the British Government still had the expectation of winning that war. And it has the further interest that Major Street had privileged access to the secret files of the Dublin Castle administration and made informative use of them. The book is thus both itself a historical document and a source of documents not generally available.

It is of course written with propaganda 'spin', which the reader will allow for as he sees fit.

The *Administration Of Ireland, 1920* is reproduced in full, along with the original Index. But we have not reproduced the green cover embossed with crowned harp in which it first appeared.

This is followed by a substantial extract from *Ireland In 1921*—a disillusioned book published in 1922, when Britain had given up the attempt to maintain direct control of Ireland, had negotiated with the 'murderers' as statesmen, and was attempting to keep Ireland within the indirectly-held Empire, the "Commonwealth", as had been done with the South African Boers. Major Street, the intelligent and purposeful Imperialist, let his pain at this "compromising" turn of events be felt.

That was a time when there was in England an incipient fascist movement, determined to maintain the glory of Empire against the "hidden hand" which was manipulating the "dark forces" of dissolution.

A review of Major Street's other books is provided by Brendan Clifford, showing that much that British propaganda of later times attributed to German Militarism or Fascism was to be found much closer to home.

An Introduction to *the British Administration Of Ireland, 1920* is provided by Dr. Pat Walsh, author of *Republicanism And Socialism* and *From Civil Rights To National War*.

£12 from Athol Books
PO Box 6589
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Flash In Japan

Sean McGouran

Some years ago, AA Gill, the television (and restaurant) critic of *The Sunday Times*, wrote an anti-German rant. He appeared unaccountably proud of the fact that it raised interest (and hackles) in Germany, France and America. He recently turned his attention to Japan, in an article *Mad In Japan* (geddit? Mad[e] in Japan?). His incapacity for writing about Germany — exemplified by his owning-up to the fact that he did not realise that Weimer "was a town" — is made worse in this outburst. He knows nothing about Japan, and went with preconceptions which he struggled mightily to hang onto. He homes-in on Horishima about which he writes, "[it] wears its unique, nuclear-age victimhood with the simpering pride of a geisha's wig." The "unique" there is not an accident, it is patently obvious that Gill has not heard of Nagasaki, or more likely, is embarrassed by it because it rather hobbles his argument. Which is that the bomb "...blew away not just the most deeply cruel military government but a thousand-year-old political and social system — the most inhuman and exploitative ever designed." It need hardly be said that no flesh is put on the bones of this assertion which is genuinely profoundly stupid. For three centuries before Commodore Perry 'opened up' Japan to trade by sailing into Yokohama harbour with a fleet of iron-clad battleships, Japanese society had been a cross between the Homeric/heroic life of the ancient Mediterranean and that of Mediaeval Europe. The major difference being that the people at the top seemed to take their responsibilities to those at the base of society rather more seriously than their European counterparts.

Gill rehearses the great economic success of Japan since WWII, "...even

in the slough of a prolonged depression, it [has] a GDP as large as Britain's, France's and Germany's combined ... Japan is about 1 1/2 times the size of the UK... twice as many people... third of the land inhabitable... no natural resources...

This is followed by "So, where did it all go wrong?". This has to do with the fact that Japan is "a socially weird disaster", but it may be his soul crying out as to why the UK or 'Britain' (he clearly does not know the difference) has been left behind. And why it is considerably 'weirder' than Japan.

He writes "[a] Japanese man on his own doesn't think he exists", the same could be said for most people in the great commercial cities of the UK (the industrial, or post-industrial cities are somewhat different, but anomie and alienation are creeping up on them. There are pages of guff about the sexual oddities of the Japanese as if it was unique to them — and as if Japan's own sexual culture were, or should have been, the same as that of Christian Europe. The latter was always deeply hypocritical, especially in Protestant Europe and America (mainly because they could not square the circle of guilt and expiation by way of Confession), and it was America, closely followed by England, who opened Japan to the modern world — even prior to that it was the Netherlands which ran the only opening to the outer world, in Nagasaki. (An interesting oddity about Nagasaki is that it is the centre of Christianity in Japan. St Francis Xavier, and other Jesuits, converted a fair number of people there just before the Japanese booted the Europeans out. For some reason, despite a lack of priests, or even apparently acknowledgement from the Vatican, they held on to their faith.) Another aspect of this is that Japan

seems to have had standard straightforward, relationships with nearby Asian states, particularly Korea and China, it was the Europeans they were suspicious of — they were entirely correct in their assessment that the hairy, smelly, bullies were not to be trusted.

Gill tries to make something unpleasant of the attitude of the Japanese towards the Koreans and also towards women in general. A headline claims "women are either drudges or sex toys" — so unlike our own wonderful society — it is probably accurate so far as many, possibly most, Japanese men are concerned, but women in Japan are as assertive a women in Europe and America. One can't help wondering if America is the honkie in the coal bunker here. Japan looked around the world in the 1870s and decided not to be a victim. It based its army on that of Prussia / Germany, the navy on the UK (and to some extent the US), modified its laws on the model of France's Civil Code and its commerce on Italy's legal framework. But mostly, it modelled itself on what was already the most successful state in the world: the USA. That was the time when the UK perceived itself as the world leader on whatever you cared to mention. The UK's (more specifically England's) problem is that it still perceives itself as cock of the walk — witness the boy Blair's war-mongering.

The Japanese are allowed the last word here, in an insert entitled *How the Japanese see us*, one of the most interesting word[s] comes from the early years of the twentieth century. A diplomat said that "...for half a century we had been enthusing about their art, yet we still thought they were barbarians. It was only when they had shot a few Russians that they "were acclaimed as a highly civilised race." It has to be said that the Ethiopians did not get quite the same respect after they bloodied Italy's nose in 1898.

Letters To The Editor

Yours faithfully

Ivor Kenna.

A Criticism

10 December.
London EC 1

Dear Sir

Like Wilson Haire (LTUR December) I have been getting LTUR and Northern Star for several years. Generally they are well-written and informative.

I've always assumed you call yourselves the Bevin Society to put off communists, trotskyists and other leftists. Actually you have very little in common with the old Cold Warrior and Empire-lover.

He would probably have accused you of stabbing him in the back. You remind me more of Konni Zilliacus, Labour Independent MP for Gateshead until 1950, who was Bevin's arch-opponent. Just read Zilliacus' book, "I Choose Peace", published by Penguin about 50 years ago and see if you don't agree.

John Clayden is back in the Cold War in his comments on Lysenko. I never came across all that gubbins about "proletarian science" and "bourgeois science" to which Clayden refers. Stalin wrote a pamphlet "On Marxism in Linguistics" against the concept of class-based language.

There were excesses on both sides in the genetics debate but things have moved on since then, with each side conceding something to the other, without directly admitting as much. Racehorses are bred from horses which have proved good at racing.

Jason Mooney refers to Chou En Lai being "asked to give his opinion about the French Revolution on its 200th anniversary". I'm sorry to say that Chou died back in 1976. It must have been someone else.

John Clayden Replies

In my review of Curthoy's book *Feminist Amnesia*, I was attempting to give a synopsis of her arguments, because I felt she had something valuable to say and because the book being a technical work is not easy to digest.

The issue according to Curthoy's was the nature of the philosophy employed in Women's Studies. She tries to illustrate this by comparing it with how the followers of Lysenko justified their scientific findings. She thinks they should have been based on scientific evidence rather than on arguments founded on an analysis which classified ideas according to a dialectical materialist method. Curthoy's did not raise the issue to make a cold war point, rather she was making an analogy with what she claims is the way that members of academic feminist movement of women's studies employ dodgy arguments to justify themselves. It is possible that by introducing her arguments about Lysenko into the review in this way, I introduced an added source of confusion, but I tried to give an honest account of what it is she is saying. I did look at Stalin's work to see if it threw any light on things although I felt it was outside the scope of the review (the book review that is), to go into it.

As I understand it, Dialectical Materialism as a concept was first conceived by Joseph Dietzgen who was a friend of Karl Marx and was introduced by him to the International Workingmen's Association as "our philosopher". Stalin along with Anton Pannekoek and the Plebs League were all influenced by him.

In his book "The Positive Outcome of Philosophy" he introduces the idea of proletarian thought and bourgeois thought in relation to philosophy. He characterises philosophy as having been a succession of historical attempts to understand how thinking takes place. He makes the distinction between

bourgeois and proletarian thought because he is of the opinion, rightly or wrongly, that all past philosophical speculation was the product of a given ruling class at its specific period of economic hegemony. This class always makes the claim at the time that its philosophy is a universal truth. However each ruling class is bound to be restricted in its appreciation of reality because it has a biased outlook which reflects its own material interests. Because it finds it impossible to own up to this, the result is that it produces an incomplete system of thinking. All philosophy is partial. In Dietzgen's opinion only the proletariat is capable of seeing the world as it really is - in an unbiased way. And once they become the ruling class, philosophy ceases and will give way to science. The point that Curthoy is making is that in the case of science, truth is arrived at as a consequence of the arguments of the scientists themselves. This has to be backed up by verifiable experimental results. In the case of the Lysenko controversy, it was illegitimate to bring in these dialectical materialist concepts, (of proletarian and bourgeois science), rather, the scientific merits of the two contending schools of thought should have settled the issue on the basis of scientific evidence.

I agree that in the light of what Stalin wrote on the subject of linguistics, he quite likely would have concurred with this argument. However I must stress that the merits of *Feminist Amnesia* have very little to do with the veracity or otherwise of her opinion on the Lysenko controversy. What she has to say is really more interesting and more relevant to contemporary events.

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Report On Whether The Left Has Been Irrevocably Split By September 11th.

Meeting on 17th January, hosted by Institute of Public Policy Research, Matilda Cooke at m.cooke@ippr.org.uk

Why Ernest Bevin? - continued from back page

response from what was at the time a numerous and vociferous intellectual left. By then their omniscient brand of marxism had become the opiate of the revolutionaries. Many of them later cured their habit the traditional way, by becoming born-again - and seeing the light of market capitalism.

In the introduction we said -

"Bevin changed the ground rules of the class war in favour of the working class and that is what socialists find so difficult to come to terms with

If he is not fully acknowledged then in reality the achievements of British Socialism are not acknowledged and a century of struggle and successes have to be written out of history. This approach to the past cannot produce worthwhile policies for the future and it is to counter it that this issue of Problems of Communism is being devoted to an assessment of his achievements. It seeks to put Bevin in his proper place in British labour history and to fully acknowledge the basis he laid for the development of socialism in Britain".

What we said about Bevin two decades ago we feel is true today. And what of our prediction about the likely consequence of failing to understand this significance?

Was this the reason the left

was the dog that failed to bark? Or rather if it did, why it was so often barking up the wrong tree?

At the time we thought it was important to draw attention to Ernest Bevin because the main influence in the labour movement then was Nye Bevan who had always opposed Bevin. The followers of Nye Bevan were now triumphant in the Labour Movement. We were appalled by how out of touch and impotent this had made the movement become, (It had passed over golden opportunities for workers' control, first offered to the miners by Manny Shinwell and later from Tony Benn, and especially the opportunity provided by the Bullock Report), and we were worried at the prospect of what would finally fill the reality vacuum (and as it happened it was Thatcher that did that).

The working class had made really substantial gains in post-war Britain and it had not been the left which had initiated them. The Communist Party and the Bevanite left was incapable of acknowledging how or why this was the case. This was largely because they were loyal to the Soviet Union; while British foreign policy was based on the assumption that the Soviet Union was hostile.

Bevin had come to this conclusion after being rebuffed by Molotov when he wanted a pact with Russia after the war. It

was also obvious that both men laid a different emphasis on the importance of parliamentary democracy, despite Stalin's admiration of the Labour Government.

Even if Bevin was wrong in this, for socialists to distort their own history, for that is what happened, is to shoot oneself in the foot. For, to hold a distorted view of your past, cripples one's ability to act with coherence in the present.

This is what we tried to understand and explain, and why we felt things were going wrong on the left.

Our attitude towards Bevin was never in the nature of an apologia, we weren't a fan club, nor did we feel the urge to create a personality cult - we have never felt the compulsion to see everything in black and white (or orange and green or red and blue for that matter); our preoccupation was always with the practical rather than the purely cerebral. And in politics - practical means recognising the realities of power.

And, in what must have no doubt been a further source of confusion, we were labelled as Stalinists, because we maintained a healthy or what we thought was a healthy scepticism about Khrushchev's motives, and we could not accept the comforting quasi religious trotskyist view that the last word on Stalin was that he was the incarnation of all that is evil in the world. Neither did we wish to forget the contribution he had made to the survival of the planet in its present form with us still on it.

We held contradictions in our minds to try to make sense of the world - after all isn't that what marxists are meant to do? This was while the real marxists seemed content to cling to their absolute truths.

The conflict between social democracy and bolshevism may have been tragic but it was never entirely mutually exclusive. But each was forced to make choices which entailed them having to accommodate their own characteristic necessary evils.

The evils of Bolshevism followed from the drastic measures that were necessary to establish the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in a backward peasant country.

The evils of Social Democracy were the consequence of having to come to an accommodation with substantial aspects of ruling class power in complex western industrial societies.

Scientific enquiry has been successful because it has always had the courage to bear disillusionment.

Accepting unpalatable facts entails shedding one's illusions and that is painful.

In politics this is even more the case. But we held it to be a virtue.

During the life spans of the two socialist movements, there were lost opportunities for them to join forces. There were some close encounters, and sometimes each came to the other's aid.

Bevin's actions were

instrumental in stopping the British government's intervention in Russia. After the Great War, he backed the dockers, members of the T & G, who refused to load the arms ship, the Jolly George. The war with Poland was going the Soviets way and the French and British met to draw up war plans.

Bevin organised a national conference whose 1,044 delegates resolved to call the first ever British political general strike on the issue of British intervention. It was this that forced Lloyd George to backed down.

The Russians returned the favour in the war against Hitler. This is how our crude practical proletarian minds saw it.

What we have witnessed in the Twentieth Century has been the working out of two different socialist strategies. That devised by Lenin on the one hand and by "the renegade" Kautsky on the other. That they would be in conflict was inevitable.

With the collapse of both we now find ourselves in a new historical situation. Socialism's State institutions may have gone, but can any just or joyful future world be able to function without socialism? - we think not.

The Heresiarch America The Beautiful!

by
Joe Keenan

from
15 Haywood Avenue
Ormeau Road, Belfast
BT7 3EU

Why Ernest Bevin?

The world is changing fast. Following the collapse of the Soviet experiment, (which has been compounded by the intellectual poverty of its surviving communists), we are now possibly witnessing the opening shots in a long predicted war between the privileged North and the impoverished South. Whatever the case, the right in America is certainly seizing its opportunity to bounce the USA and with it the Western World into a more authoritarian and militaristic straight jacket to further consolidate the world-wide hegemony of its liberal market economic strategy - egged on by most of the current Labour party and many former marxists of the left.

So perhaps now is the time - if we are to make a contribution towards the survival of a realistic and functional socialist voice - for this magazine to take stock and in the process examine and explain our past outlook.

Ernest Bevin is still perceived by those on the left who still remember him, as a right-wing union leader of the thirties. For a left -wing socialist group to have adopted his name is seen as eccentric, not to say perverse.

The Bevin Society grew out of the British and Irish Communist Organisation.

Our reassessment of Ernest Bevin first appeared in *Problems of Communism* No 20 Summer 1981 which marked the centenary of his birth.

There were three articles. (We hope intend to reprint some of this material). The first, by Nina Fishman, gave a general outline of Bevin's ideas and achievements.

This was followed Brendan Clifford's *Aspects of the Cold War*, which presented the evidence that the Soviet Union was expansionist following the war and asserted that it had hoodwinked the TUC in the 1920s. It concluded that Bevin's contribution to the setting up of NATO was justified from the perspective of democratic socialism. As well as this, he gave evidence that the Bevanite left was also, at the time, fully in agreement with this assessment, (although it later adopted the schizoid CP and Trotskyist view on the matter - i.e. that Stalin was not contemptuous of western democracy - heaping confusion on confusion).

Moreover during the Berlin crisis of 1948 both Nye Bevan and Michael Foot were urging Bevin to send in *tanks*. Bevin's milder and more reconciliatory solution was the Air Lift, and this left a way open for a resolution of

the crisis. Bevan and Foot's advice had it been taken would have sparked off a world war.

Manus O'Riordan wrote the third article. This was about the meeting in 1946 which a Labour delegation, headed by Morgan Philips, had had with Stalin and the impression the Labour Government had made on him. (See the Daily Herald 22.8.46).

He produced evidence to show that it was Stalin who instructed the Communist Party to drop its Leninist revolutionary policies and adopt what was to become the *The British Road to Socialism*, with its emphasis on the viability for Britain of the parliamentary system.

In early 1983, a group of BICO and Labour Party members calling themselves the Ernest Bevin Society published a magazine called *The London Socialist*. This sought to develop a viable understanding of the world, inspired by this line of thought - what we preferred to think of as a more realistic socialist politics. The London branch of BICO changed its name to the Ernest Bevin Society and produced the *L&TUR* the latest copy of which you hold in your hands today!

This effort met with little

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