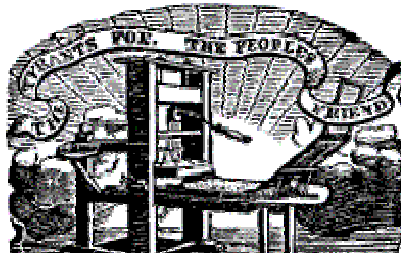


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Editorial

A Return to Democracy?

Sean Gabb

Leaving aside the assemblies of the ancient world, I cannot think of a war so closely debated in advance as this one. It is the normal practice of governments to begin wars with a minimum of prior debate and with justifications that - however much contempt they may provoke in the future - bring enough public support in the present. This time, it is different. I am not sure how it is in America, but here in England, the politicians have found themselves compelled to state and defend their case for war. A few weeks ago, Tony Blair had to go into a television studio and face a roasting from an audience of reasonably ordinary people. A few evenings later, Jack Straw and various other

worthies had to face the same. After several generations of decreasing contact between rulers and people, we have returned to something like the old ideal of democratic accountability. Part of this has to do with the fact that our political class is itself divided over the need for war with Iraq. Most of it, though, has to do with the Internet. The established media can no longer ignore whole points of view, while giving the appearance of a consensus that does not really exist. With something like half of the adult British population now on line - which means just about everyone who is interested in politics - every statement for or against war, and every shred of supporting evidence, is open to immediate and full inspection and is open to unedited public debate.

I will not use this Editorial to restate my own opposition to war. I have said enough already. And the rest of this issue of *Free Life* contains quite enough opinion for and against from others. I will simply celebrate the fact that we have a debate at all, and that the outcome of this debate will materially affect the decision whether to go to war and how to fight any war. It is nice to live once again in a democracy.

It is particularly nice to find that students have not lost their old ability to take and defend positions on issues of national importance. When I was first at university, in the early 1980s, I took politics as a natural fact of student life. Every second Wednesday evening, there was the Union General Meeting - a noisy, frequently drunken cockpit, but a place also of impassioned debate over the issues of the day. At all other times, there were the coffee bars, the dining halls, caucus meetings, and even whispered debates in the main library, to keep up the excitement

All this is what I most plainly missed when I became a university lecturer. I found myself teaching classes of the politically indifferent. At first, I thought my students were unwilling to discuss politics with me or in front of me. I soon realised, though, that they really were indifferent. Apart from the usual socialist cults with their two members each, and the various Islamic societies, there was no political activity. Before I grew used to this silence, I longed for the sight of bearded Trotskyites, and radical homosexuals, and lesbian feminists, and even those proto-Blairites whom my friends and I once airily dismissed as useful allies against the left but in themselves a political dead end. Sad to have to have to share a university with these horrors, I thought at the time. Sadder still, I realised later, to be without them. In the longer term, what I took for a natural fact turned out to be a passing moment.

For the moment, all is changed. I am typing the Editorial about seven feet from a table where five students are engaged in furious debate over whether to go to war. The debate could be better in the technical sense. Some important arguments appear overlooked. There is a concentration on trivial arguments. One woman seems to have switched sides more than once. So far, more heat has been generated than light. I could say that it was all better when I was that age. Even with my memory, though, the years can deceive. In 1980, I had dinner with a mature student of my present age, who assured me how much more sophisticated students were in his day. I doubted him then. Perhaps I should doubt myself now.

I hope there will not be a war. But, be there peace or war tomorrow, there is debate on the issue today. Perhaps this is a special case. Perhaps as soon as the issue is reasonably settled one way or the other, my students will fall back into their political quiescence, more interested in getting me to premark their essays, and in making friends with useful contacts in the big City firms. Or perhaps a taste for political debate will survive its present cause. Will the passions aroused over this Iraqi business be transferred to other issues? Will my students be sitting up all night next to argue about Europe and immigration and labour market reregulation? Perhaps they will not, but I can hope they will.

War in the Middle East: Why in the British National Interest
David Carr <carr@libertarian.co.uk>

There are really two questions here; the first is whether or not British forces should act in concert with US forces to forcibly depose the Iraqi *régime* and the second is whether there is any justification for any such attack howsoever composed.

It is the first question I intend to address and, in doing so, I hope I go at least some way to answering the second.

The only consistent and sustainable reason why British military force should be employed in any venture is that it is in the national interest to do so. It is my view that HMG's decision to commit British forces to a forthcoming assault on Iraq fulfils this criterion and it does so for two reasons the first of which is security and the second of which is political.

Dealing with the first, it has been argued that a middle-ranking and rather denuded third-world country could not plausibly pose any military or security threat to any Western power but that only holds true in terms of 20th century military calculations.

If it was a matter of tanks, bombers, infantry divisions and ICBMs then Iraq would, indeed, pose no threat whatsoever to Britain. It may pose a threat to other countries in the region but that's not Britain's problem. But we are now living (and will have to get used to living) in a post-conventional warfare age. Nuclear technology is now over 60 years old and cannot be assumed to be as excruciatingly difficult to replicate as it once was. Similarly, advances in pathology and technology have made viral or bacteriological agents more portable and obtainable than might have been previously imagined.

It is not necessary for a foreign power to be possessed of a fleet of long-range bombers or a phalanx of missiles in order to pose a potentially catastrophic threat to another country. All that is needed is someone with a suitcase and a passport. It is worth remembering that a handful of Islamic terrorists killed more people in New York and Washington on September 11th 2001 than were killed by the Japanese Air Force at Pearl Harbour.

All any foreign *régime* needs now is some money and access to willing actors. Saddam Hussein has both.

It has been argued that one must draw a distinction between secular national socialists like Hussein and Islamists like Bin Laden because the two ideologies are set in bitter opposition to each other and the respective proponents would never co-operate. However this is an assumption that no longer holds true. The political dynamic in the Arab world over the last 20 years or so has seen these two movements become largely co-terminous as a result of having common foes. Does anyone believe that the secular Palestinian nationalists of the Fatah movement do not co-operate with the religious zealots of Hamas and Islamic *Jihad*?

But why Hussein? Why not just go after the various Islamic groups. Well, we know that Hussein is the paymaster of Palestinian suicide bombers so he clearly is prepared to finance and export murderous terror. We also know that he has been making threats of vengeance for years against the powers that attacked him in 1991. This could be discounted as being nothing more than braggadocio for home consumption but the price of being wrong about that could be very high indeed.

Of course, I cannot prove any of this. It cannot be proved that there are definable links between the Iraqi *régime* and Al-Qaeda. It cannot be proved that Saddam Hussein would definitely sponsor or incite terrorist activity in Britain. But, in the same way, it was not possible to prove that the Soviet Union had designs on Western Europe. Nonetheless nobody was prepared to take the chance knowing what we did know about that *régime*.

Taking out the current Iraqi *régime* will not end the terrorist threat to either Britain or the USA but it will eradicate one of its most likely and highly motivated sponsors.

The alternative is to leave Hussein (or his sons when they take over) in place, adopt such reasonable security measures as we can and hope for the best. But, like it or not, the WTC attack has proved to be a watershed in the history of warfare. It has buried, probably forever, the orthodox distinction between civilian and military targets. It also requires a reassessment of security policy to take into account the asymmetric calculations of the future.

The second reason for my position is that I feel it is of the utmost importance at this time that we maintain our strategic alliance with the USA. I think it is vital for our national interest and even worth taking some risks for.

I don't think I need to work too hard to convince any proper conservative or libertarian of the case for extracting this country from the European Union. If we do not succeed in this task then the whole question of national interest becomes redundant.

A while ago I wrote an article on www.samizadata.net/blog, to the effect that the policy of standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the Americans was going to prove intolerably irritating to the more anti-American Europeans and would serve to remind the Americans of our value as an independent ally and actor. It would seem that, thus far, my view has been vindicated. There is now a visible and growing wedge between Britain and the Franco-German-Belgian heart of the EU. This can only be a good thing. It does not, of itself, give us back our independence but it looks an awful lot like the kind of kick-start that such a process requires.

Further it would appear that the US position is managing to drive all manner of wedges and splinters into the entire European continent. Even the BBC pundits are admitting to the possibility of this being an impediment to EU cooperation and expansion. The French look desperate, the Germans look bemused and the Belgians are nervous. What's not to like? It is entirely possible that the Americans might just engender the collapse of the whole ghastly ziggurat.

This was almost certainly not the American intention but it may well be the effect. Such is the opaque nature of geo-politics.

I realise that many conservatives and libertarians who might otherwise sympathise with the US position are disinclined to do so out of a wholly understandable reluctance to bestow any sort of benediction or endorsement upon Tony Blair. However, this is to place sentiment before reason and instinct before calculation. Not everything that the government does is illegitimate. Sometimes government agencies pursue and punish thieves, muggers and rapists. These are activities which may or may not be conducted more efficiently by private agencies but that does not make it illegitimate or morally questionable for the state to do it.

Equally, it is perfectly legitimate for state forces to move and act against foreign threats. It is for this reason that I support the US in its war against Islamic terror organisations and the countries that knowingly harbour, finance or incite them. Slaughter on the scale seen on September 11th 2001 is

intolerable. That governments are a threat to liberty is axiomatic and true but they are not the only threats to liberty.

In the case of Britain and Tony Blair, well, support for his position on Iraq does not mean that either he or New Labour is quickened to any greater degree than before this whole sorry saga began. The shock wave set off by the WTC attacks have, I detect, given birth to a new, robust and refreshingly sensible socio-political movement in America and from which I think that country will benefit greatly in the long term. I submit that it would be substantially in our national interest for some of it to rub off on this country.

15th February 2003: The Greatest Demo Ever
Peter M. Le Mare <pete@plumpeace.nildram.co.uk>

I wrote to the people on the Cornwall coaches: This will probably be the greatest day of your lives, so far. This will prove to be the biggest demonstration ever held in the history of the world. The UN's (United Nation's) prime purpose was to "free the peoples of the world from the scourge of war" Now the people are demanding just that! Have a really nice day in the best of company!

This planned war on Iraq may well be the beginning of third World War, which would be the war to end the world but, anyway, will necessarily increase the likelihood of individual terrorist attacks on ourselves. It must be emphasised that there is no direct connection between individual terrorists networks or groups, with Iraq and all the evidence points at the opposite, but it seems obvious that an attack on a country to impose our *régime* on it will cause extreme resentment around the world against us and the US. We must find non-military means of resolving conflicts. Terror can never lessen or defeat terrorism. We must treat the causes of terrorism, whether it be individual terrorism or state terror. Peace with justice is the only reasonable answer.

Good Luck. Each of you is important and necessary and together we can change this world!

Although I am often accused of being too optimistic, my prediction was correct and I believe there were more than 2 Million people there in the Park and on the March. There are three good reasons why this is true; first as I came into the park at Hyde Park corner and came through the trees into the open park, I compared this amazing sight with seeing 750,000 people in the park at the end of an Aldermaston March in the 60's/70's and it appeared to me to be at least three times that size and I not only had many thousands of people behind me and already more thousands were already pouring out of the park; second, also as we came into the park, the policemen on duty, who had been told by their superiors, said there were 2 million; the Police estimate broadcast to the media said 750,000 but in recent years they have always said there were a third of the real number so this figure also agrees with me! I don't wish to 'play the numbers game' but each of these people will represent 10, 20, or 30 others who did not come for some reason. And of course this was happening all over the world!

I have been peace and freedom campaigning for nearly 50 years and this was mind boggling even for me. I have almost no words left, for it: it gives me hope for this world and the Human Race. If democracy means anything it was really democracy: the actual voice of the people. This was at least three times any other demonstration, ever; I could go on for reams about the strange absence of normal shoppers or sightseers and traffic (other than coaches - my friend estimated that there would be 20,000 coaches!), especially coming into London (the police had, virtually ordered, no-one to come into central London unless they were coming to the march); about the fact that the banners saying where each group was coming from or their organizations were swamped by the numbers; about that the people there, were a not just the "usual suspects" but a true cross section of

people - and not naive about why they were there (even the only spectators I saw on a balcony of The Ritz were waving and 'thumbs up'); about if our, so called, leaders try to ignore this it will make the vast majority very angry indeed and I believe people will no longer be suppressed into a form of apathy, it may be the beginning of the end of Party Politics and people will require their representative to be their true servants; etc. etc.

But what of the reaction by Blair and Straw, in particular? Obviously they weren't going to have a 'road to Damascus' revelation but, to try to change the reasons for war, to be a moral one of removing Saddam Hussein is cynical in the extreme. There is no moral grounds for *régime* change by force: it is totally against International Law and would otherwise be an argument to remove Blair's and Bush's *régime*; Bush was not elected and Blair is now acting as if democracy is only to be taken into account if the populace actually agree with him, which is the very opposite of democracy. In his press conference (18 Feb 2003) he blames Saddam for killing thousands of children every month but it is him, Mr Blair, that is killing these children (5000 a month) with his and Bush's sanctions, which, do not have any effect on Saddam (unless it gains him more support) but only his people. And this slaughter in the words of Condoleezza Rice, considers it a price worth paying (for the oil?). Sanctions should be only on arms and associated products and not on 'vaccines meant to protect Iraqi infants from diphtheria and yellow fever that the Blair government, say are "capable of being used in weapons of mass destruction"' (John Pilger Feb. 2003).

When Blair twists the truth like this how can any of us actually believe in or have any respect for him. He has even recently repeated those lies about the inspectors. According to Scott Ritter a previous Chief Weapons inspector they were not thrown out of Iraq - they were withdrawn to enable the US and Britain to bomb Iraq -; they were not refused entry to any premises or site; they destroyed 95 per cent of all the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD's) and we know, because we sold them to them, and the only chemicals and biological agents left would have deteriorated to be unusable. Blair and Straw have also said that Saddam Hussein would not have let in the inspectors, again, without this massive show of force in the Gulf (while we have no money to pay the firemen a decent wage and the NHS is desperately short of resources which is why we are, to all intents and purposes, privatising it) but I have heard over many years that the Iraq *régime* and Saddam himself have invited them back at any time: he has also invited Blair and any MP's and the whole of the US Congress to go and look; the only condition was that the inspectors would not have CIA spies in its number, again admitted to by Scott Ritter.

And anyway they are not, a direct and present, threat to us, which is the only legal justification for war. Even if they had some weapons or the inspectors found them, it still would not allow war: not every other means of enforcing UN resolutions have been exhausted. Hoon and Blair say, "He (Saddam) would use them". Hoon, in the House of Commons has said we would use them! And we have thousands of WMD's, which are totally illegal under International Law (in all, at present conceivable, circumstances). In fact the only possibly legal threat or use of them (if you already held them illegally anyway) might be if your state was in immediate danger of be destroyed, so Hussein is the one that is morally on better ground! There is even great doubt, according to Stephen C. Pelletiere, CIA's senior political analyst on Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war, in the NY Times Jan 31, 2003, that Saddam gassed the Kurds in Halabja, which he regarded as terrorists against his country, anyway. I am of the opinion that Saddam is a very cruel and authoritarian dictator and should go and give freedom to Iraq, but I also think that, although he thinks he is some saint on a crusade, Mr Blair, is about to practice (and has practised) an 'evil' massacre on Iraq. 'Evil', I don't know another word for this, things are frequently done for the best of intentions but this war, is extreme and is in no way, moral!

Not only do we have thousands of Nuclear Weapons (WMD's), which we hold illegally (14 International judges at the International Court of Justice at the Hague unanimously said so!) that

can destroy the world many, many, times over, but there, in the Middle East, Sharon (convicted in his own courts of war crimes) has control of 200 to 500 nuclear Weapons (more than enough to destroy the world, at least as we know it). Anyone will know that his fundamentalist government would use them and remember he has invaded his all his neighbours several times and is killing people in his lands in their hundreds, because he thinks says some of them are terrorists.

I think, as does, John Pilger, that the significance of this demonstration cannot be overstated. But the people on the demonstration on Saturday, were not only a huge cross section of the populace but saw the whole hypocrisy and lies (above and more) and did not need this explained to them. No longer will the nation swing behind the war effort, as Mr Blair seems to still believe. I sincerely believe that all of us didn't just make a gesture that day. We will and must keep up the pressure and this war is still stoppable. I think now is the time to "think globally but act locally". We should demonstrate in our communities with regular vigils or marches in every small or large town; even 'sit downs' in appropriate places; in Cornwall we have St. Mawgan an American air base, which may be of great importance to the war especially if France refuses to let us use there air space, as they did on the not guilty Libya many years ago; and another suggestion by Dr Richard Lawson (Somerset GP, and Green Party member, never been on strike in his life before) calling for a 15-minute stoppage in every place of work (or study?) to discuss the war with our work colleagues once a week: 9-9.15 on Monday morning sounds like a good, easily remembered time; and I leave any other suggestions to your lively imaginations.

Again I say that the war can be stopped and we can begin, in the future, to resolve conflicts by non-military means. If we do not do this we will literally destroy this world. I finish this with a little chant I heard at Faslane "I believe in the power of the people, 'cos the power of the people don't stop. (repeat)".

Peter M. Le Mare is Honorary Director and Cornwall Delegate to CND Council, Nuclear Free Coalition (Plymouth/Devonport), Liasion - Mouvement de la Paix en Bretagne, Peace Moves Coalition (Penwith), etc. etc

Why the British Right Should Oppose the War on Iraq Randal

A recent poll showed that half of British Conservative Party supporters oppose war with Iraq at this time (without a UN resolution). Yet the Conservative Party leadership is utterly servile in its adherence to the government position on Iraq, and the right-leaning press is also broadly supportive of the proposed attack. To understand why, it is merely necessary to grasp, in the case of the Conservative Party leadership, that the people concerned are opportunists seeking power at any cost, and they believe that no party ever won support in Britain by undermining "the boys out there" in a war. As for the papers, consideration needs to be given to the identity of the owners, as usual, whose interests are not the same as Britain's in this matter.

I believe that British people of a conservative and patriotic disposition ought to be forcefully opposing the proposed attack on Iraq by the US and whatever allies it can muster. To see why, it is necessary to consider first, what justifications such a person (and I use myself as the example, obviously) might accept in support of war generally, then to look at the justifications generally advanced by supporters of the war, and deal with them in turn, and finally to assess the broader position as regards the proposed war.

Justifications for war

As a conservative, I am not a pacifist. I accept that there are times when war is necessary, and certainly believe the best way to avoid war is to maintain a sufficiently strong defence to deter attacks. I would accept without question the need for war in response to an ongoing armed attack against my country. I would extend that to war in support of an ally of my country, or even in collective defence against an actual attack on a neutral country. These are the only justifications I would accept without question.

In extremis, I might accept the argument that war could be justified for reasons of realpolitik - if a rival nation threatened to gain an unmatched level of power or control over a crucial resource, which would be likely to render future defence of my country impossible, or merely in order to stay on the good side of the most powerful nation in the world. Likewise, in an extreme (and, in practice, unrealistic) situation, I might even accept the need for a humanitarian intervention in another country. However, these latter cases must be treated with extreme caution. They are prone to abuse by those who seek to rationalise justification for a war, which they desire for other reasons, such as those who believe in promoting interventionism and global government per se, and who wish to undermine national sovereignty in general. We saw this in the absurd claim that there was a humanitarian "crisis" in Kosovo (before western intervention triggered one) requiring international intervention. We saw the realpolitik argument for securing vital resources deployed in ridiculous claims that if Iraq were to gain control of Kuwaiti oil, it could threaten the west with oil blackmail.

In practice, in the real world, neither the realpolitik resource justification, nor the humanitarian intervention justification, has actually applied to any recent situation in my view, and the safest assumption when either is put forward is to treat it with the most extreme scepticism. Most likely, those putting it forward are exaggerating the situation to promote a course of action they desire for other reasons.

These are the reasons, then, for which I would support my government making war with the fruits of my tax payments and in my name.

Rationalisations for attacking Iraq

What, then, are the justifications put forward for the proposed war on Iraq? Well, they have been many and varied, and include some of the themes mentioned above.

The self-defence rationale has been put forward on the basis that war would be a pre-emptive strike against a country which constitutes a threat to us, our allies, or neutral neighbours, if it is left unattacked. The threat is variously given as a direct conventional military threat to neighbouring countries (as exemplified by the Iraqi attacks on Iran in 1980 and Kuwait in 1990), a direct "weapon of mass destruction" (meaning, in practice, those categories of weapon formerly described by the NATO acronym NBC - Nuclear, Biological, Chemical) threat to neighbouring countries or to Israel, or a threat to us and our allies by way of supporting terrorism, particularly with WMD's.

The first two "threats" are absurd on their faces as justifications for war. Deterrence is the proven means of dealing with such threats, and the idea that Saddam will launch such a direct attack when the inevitable consequence is his certain utter destruction is so ridiculous as to invite suspicion of conscious deceit on the part of those putting it forward. Apart from anything else, it is clear that in both previous cases of Iraqi aggression, Saddam Hussein calculated erroneously but for understandable reasons that he would succeed - first because Iran was in the throes of a revolution and second because he mistakenly thought the US would not act against him in defence of Kuwaiti independence. In the event, America chose to do so, and it is up to the American *régime* to deter possible future aggression by making its position clearer to Hussein in future.

The third is more difficult to assess, because it is more nebulous. However, the facts that are known beyond reasonable doubt are the following. Such close Iraqi involvement with terrorism as may have occurred, was with the old secularist Arab nationalist cause, which is no longer a problem for anybody except the Israelis, who are no special friends of ours and who can look after themselves. The Iraqi *régime* has no apparent significant links with modern Islamic terrorism of the al Qaeda kind, and indeed such links are very unlikely because the Iraqi *régime* is itself one of the prime targets for the fundamentalists' hostility. Islamic fundamentalist *ihadis* want few things more than the overthrow of the current Iraqi *régime* and the creation of a chaotic, occupied and divided Iraq, in which they will be able to operate much more freely, and in which US targets abound.

Such an alliance (between Saddam and al Qaeda), on the basis that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend", is only likely if Iraq is pushed to the very wall by the west. To suggest that Saddam's *régime* would give WMD's to terrorists for a strike against the west, at immense risk to Saddam personally if they were used and with virtually nothing to gain by doing so, seems speculative in the extreme.

I have seen allegations of past Iraqi involvement in old terrorist actions such as the first World Trade Centre attack or the Oklahoma bombing in America, but such allegations are far from convincing, and do not amount to evidence of an ongoing or likely future terrorist threat from Iraq, in my view, even if they were correct.

I do not believe an attack on Iraq can possibly be justified as a defensive measure.

A second argument often made in support of an attack on Iraq is that it is vital to enforce the decisions of the UN, particularly the disarmament of Iraq agreed to in the 1991 cease-fire, and the current inspection process. It will be apparent from my comments above, that Iraq is not to be considered a real threat to us, even if it were to be in possession of "WMD's", so I can hardly take seriously the suggestion that war is necessary to enforce the disarmament of a sovereign country merely because the UN says it must be disarmed. Indeed, a world in which the UN is used to justify the militarily-enforced restriction of NBC weapons to those nations approved by the Security Council and, in particular, America, strikes me as much more dangerous than one where countries are secure in their sovereignty without the absolute necessity to acquire WMD's secretly in order to deter likely future pre-emptive attacks if they are ever seen as a potential threat by America.

As a man of the political right, the credibility of the UN is of no intrinsic importance to me, except insofar as it promotes the resolution of disputes between nations by peaceful means, rather than by military means. Indeed, many of the sovereignty-infringing activities of the UN could positively do with being discredited, in my view. But if the UN declines to support a wrongful attack on Iraq by the most powerful nation in the world, and stands up and requires the attack to be carried forward in open defiance of international law, well so be it. It would be better so, and less to the discredit of the UN, than for the UN to rubberstamp an open breach of its founding principles simply because the party in breach is too powerful to restrain.

So, I cannot see any convincing UN-based argument in favour of supporting this war. Frankly, that would apply even if the reluctant members of the Security Council were to be won round and a resolution specifically authorising force were to be passed. That, in my view, would legalise the action, but would still not make it right or necessary.

The realpolitik argument in favour of an attack on Iraq for securing oil resources is not widely put forward in public, because it is seen as deeply inhumane by popular opinion today, especially on the left. It is, however, sometimes made by those on the right who want to appear hard-edged and realistic in the face of woolly liberal thinking. Conceivably, circumstances could arise in which we

were threatened with control of a vital resource (oil, usually) by an enemy who could use that control to bring us to our knees. This was the argument Japan used to justify its pre-emptive attack on the US at Pearl Harbour, and it was an argument used to justify the vital importance of the Middle East as a prize fought over by the west and the Soviets during the Cold War. In both those cases it probably had some validity.

However, it is unrealistic to apply this argument to Iraq today. There is a lot of oil in Iraq, but there is also a lot elsewhere, and if Iraqi oil were to be withheld, the price would go up for a while, but alternative sources of oil and indeed of power would simply become more economic to exploit. Perhaps America would have to become a little less protective of its environment rather than killing foreigners for oil. There would be economic costs to the west, but they would not be anything like insurmountable. Meanwhile, Iraq would be depriving itself of its sole source of income.

Since, for the reasons set out above, Iraq is not realistically a threat to Kuwait or Saudi Arabia given minimal US precautions, the realpolitik argument for attacking Iraq to secure supplies of oil fails.

Do we have to attack Iraq simply because the US is determined to do so, either for Foreign Office realpolitik reasons of preserving influence and goodwill in Washington or for emotive reasons of sticking up for an ally? No, it seems to me. If America is embarking on a foolish and dangerous course of action, then we are better off out of it, whether for reasons of self-interest or because a true friend does not encourage his ally to do such stupid things. Indeed, the course the US government has set out upon is precisely that warned against by many of America's most eminent founders, and the consequences in terms of corruption of American society and its Constitution are likely to be profound. Indeed, if the good of the American people were our prime consideration, we should oppose this war for that reason also.

Finally we come to the most dangerous argument in support of the attack on Iraq, and the one Tony Blair has finally turned to in the face of the massive demonstrations against his policy of supporting the US attack on Iraq. This is the leftist argument that invasion and "*régime* change" is a moral necessity in the face of the evil of the Iraqi *régime*, or to give liberty to the Iraqi people. It is an argument that any self-respecting conservative patriot should regard with the utmost suspicion. In practice, it should always be opposed by conservatives (excepting the most extreme and unlikely Pol Pot-style final solutions), leading as it does directly to global government and the end of national sovereignty. As justifications for interference in the internal affairs of sovereign countries, we start with genocide, move down to suppression of secessionist nationalist movements as in Kosovo, and we end up with women's rights, racism awareness, environmentalism and equality. What we support in the hands of a Bush, we must accept will eventually fall into the hands of a Clinton. We heard the support on the left for invasion of Afghanistan on the basis of the suppression of women's liberties there, and we should remember the attempts to portray Austria under Haider as beyond the Pale of governmental acceptability. It is not far down the road of interventionism before we arrive at sanctions and ultimately war to remove unacceptably rightwing governments.

This is the most dangerous argument, however, precisely because it is the one most likely to win support among the British electorate. The precedent of Kosovo now supports interventionism, because people do not remember that there was no mass eviction of Kosovo Albanians before NATO threatened Yugoslavia with attack, merely unpleasant and sometimes murderous Yugoslav government repression of Albanian secessionism (and terrorism). They do not generally recall that the ultimate result of the intervention was the ethnic cleansing of the non-Albanian population in most of Kosovo. People falsely remember it as a "successful" intervention, which supposedly prevented ethnic cleansing or mass murder, rather than one which merely changed the identity of

the group which was ethnically cleansed. The BBC campaign to swing support behind the government has already started, with a long piece on Radio 4 this morning about the suffering and fears of the Iraqi Kurds. Expect the mainstream newspapers and television channels to be full of stories about the evils of the Saddam *régime* and the desperation of the "Iraqi people".

Fortunately, Blair has made arguing this case convincingly very difficult for himself, even with his trademark "obvious sincerity", which takes in so many of the unwary, because he spent so long insisting that *régime* change was not the objective, but rather mere "genuine disarmament". Since even "genuine disarmament" would have left the Iraqi people to suffer under the unbearable repression of the Saddam *régime*, we can reasonably ask Blair whether he was "obviously sincere" then, or whether he is today when he makes the opposite case.

Nevertheless, intervention in Iraq for the good of the Iraqi people, whether dressed up as promoting their liberty or their economic and material well-being or both, is not an argument any conservative should accept as a justification for military action by his government. The liberty and well being of the Iraqi people is the business of the Iraqi people alone, and any who wish to support them as individuals. It is not a matter for foreign governments.

So the arguments put forward for Britain supporting an attack on Iraq fail, for me as a man generally of the political right. Any self-respecting conservative ought to start from the position that war should not be undertaken, unless a positive case can be made for it. Even if the human costs in the lives of British and Iraqi servicemen and innocent civilians are discounted, there is the inherent evil of increasing government expenditure, and government's power generally.

Geopolitics

What of the overall global situation, and Britain's long term geopolitical interests at this time?

We are now in a time when the US is the hyperpower, with unapproachable (in the short run) military and economic predominance in the world. We have to choose whether or not we want to support that hyperpower and assist it to establish precedents for the use of that unapproachable military power whenever it deems appropriate, and to ride the coat tails of the hyperpower to reflected glory and vicarious power. If we do so, we must accept the consequences. The most obvious of these are that we share the enmity of those who fight that hyperpower, and that we stand or fall with it. If it falls, inconceivable as that always seems when the rising empire is at the height of its power, we will share in that fall. On the other hand, if it succeeds, we must accept that we must abandon any idea that we could have objectives or values incompatible with those of the hyperpower, for there will be little sympathy and less support for the former henchman of the boss later turned upon by the same boss. When the US *régime* decides what we must do on Northern Ireland to assuage popular opinion in the US electorate, we will have no choice but to obey, and when the US *régime* says we must accept Israel's policies in the occupied territories, we will again have no course open but acceptance.

I am no visceral anti-American. I have in the past argued that rather than be submerged in a united Europe, we would be far happier as a state of the US (if given only the choice between national deaths). However, as a British patriot I am not prepared to accept that British interests will never differ from US interests, or to accept the inevitable slide into absorption which will undoubtedly follow our hanging onto the coat-tails of the US as it dissolves the protections of national sovereignty and international law. America has many interests and attitudes in common with Britain, and both America and Britain share a glorious history in terms of what they have brought to the world by their shared culture and the wisdom of their thinkers, and particularly the institutions and attitudes of limited government. However, those British people who fail to

distinguish at all between US interests and British interests, or British culture and American culture, just like those who advocate merging Britain with Europe, are little better than Quislings in the service of a foreign power.

Now is the time to stand back from support for the US project, while there may still be time to restrain it and promote the creation of a European rival. This means leaving NATO, and politely expelling all US military forces from our territory, just as it means resisting any further efforts to integrate Britain into a European state. We must stand neutral between the two and support the inviolability of national sovereignty at every opportunity, for the complete global victory of any state would be the end of Britain and a disaster for the world.

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On the Clash of Civilisations: Islam and the Rest
Jeremy Stanford <eurocep@dircon.co.uk>

An obvious question to ask as the crisis of Islamic terrorism unfolds is whether the situation calls for a Jimmy Carter or a George W. Bush. The ferocity, unpredictability and global nature of these attacks suggest the need for lines of communication; to establish Islamic fundamentalists' basic demands of the West, to provide targets for negotiation, and to offer some prospect of ultimate closure.

Unfortunately, from all we have learnt of the Islamic militants, there are no terms for negotiation. The issue is not just a question of changing policy towards Israel, nor even of Western companies and individuals removing their influence from Islamic countries. The aim of the militants appears to be to establish a contiguous body of Islamic states throughout the Middle East and South East Asia. This itself would be a stage in establishing the supremacy of Islamic rule throughout the world. The type of administration that such militants favour is based on strict Islamic *rrSharia* law; as witnessed not in Saudi Arabia, but in Afghanistan under the Taliban.

Non-Muslim countries are at a helpless disadvantage in responding to such Islamic militancy. Christian based states, while prepared to engage in war to support a just cause, do not accept the use of suicidal combatants or the wilful slaughter of civilians to achieve military or political aims. These methods of Islamic militants transcend terrorism rules as well as those of conventional warfare; the militants themselves do not fear death. Among the world's one billion Muslim population the pool of radicalised Islamicists willing to engage in terrorist acts is expanding. While radical groups share similar aims, and possibly similar sources of finance, their organisational structures are independent, globally dispersed, and largely hidden. Not only are radical Islam's ultimate aims quite unacceptable to the West; we cannot even share a dialogue on what it means to be human.

But is there anything we can understand of the fundamentalist Islamic perception of the world? Sanskrit philosophy, on which modern Hinduism and Buddhism are based, takes a similar view on the importance of life and death. The 5000 year old scriptures of the Bhagawad Gita tell of a great battle between the forces of good and evil. Arjuna, the master archer, is disconsolate at the thought of killing his opposing kinsmen. Lord Krishna with frightening imagery reveals the incalculable scale of the universe. He explains to Arjuna the transience of our human life, as we proceed through the cycle of birth, death and rebirth; advancing or retarding our spiritual consciousness according to our thoughts and deeds. Arjuna's resolve is restored, knowing the deaths he may cause will release evil-doers to a new life with the opportunity to reverse their evil karma. Arjuna engages in the great

battle against evil in the certainty that an enlightened nature in his next life will be his spiritual reward.

Of course, Islam has a different understanding of the after life. A paradise flowing with milk and honey is not dissimilar to a Christian everlasting heaven. But the importance of Arjuna's revelation, for our understanding, is his overwhelming conviction that it is his natural duty to fight. This is a message that Islamic fundamentalists would understand well. And it is one that the Western world, under the leadership of the Christian Bush and Blair, accept too. The extremist Muslim world and the Western world, each from a different perspective of what is good and what is evil, seem set on a battle of global scale.

To suggest a solution to this uncompromising struggle means taking sides. What would Lord Krishna think of supporting the insatiably capitalist West when his message for mankind was to follow our purest, simplest, spiritual nature? Perhaps the answer lies in the Hindu belief that all life is sacred; and in the practice of *sanyassin* to avoid harming any living creature. Yet, in Vedic Hindu terms, even such fundamental beliefs are subject to compromise when threatened with the harm of overwhelming evil.

Compromise there must be. The West may adopt greater understanding of Islam and sensitivity towards its culture. It may restrain its hopes of a universal consumerist empire. But the global Islamic community must take responsibility over actions taken in its name.

It is now Islam's duty to decide upon its own nature: Whether its religion is the adaptable, creative, inspirational force of its past, or it is that of a terrorist militia, intent on world domination by destroying the freedoms of the rest of humanity. The choice between good and evil today lies within the Islamic community itself. It may encourage or it may stifle support for Islamic terrorism.

Resolving this philosophical question may determine whether the world faces something like peace, or it is led once more into an all-consuming universal battle between civilisations.

Jeremy Stanford spent an extended youth absorbing Sanskrit philosophy. He has studied Arabic and has practised advertising and public relations in several Muslim countries of the Middle East, as well as in London and The City. He has been publisher of the EU-critical website, Eurocritic Magazine; and he retains membership of the Conservative Association he joined in 1989. When not engaged in editing, copywriting or designing, he writes occasionally on political and economic affairs.

Sean Gabb on the War with Iraq: A Brief Reply
Ken Nebel <ken1@chartermi.net>

Sean,

A short reply to your article in the last *Free Life*. In her glory days, Britain was more than happy to go to the defence of her subjects, no matter where they were in the world. This insistence on seeing a "clear and present threat" prior to action (would, say, the firebombing of the London underground *a la* Korea, or the destruction of Westminster Cathedral be sufficient?) reminds me that both France and England, as well as Germany, are the tired old men of Europe, no longer fit to rule the world.

I think it not inconsequential that all three countries have, since 1945, coddled their populations with socialist schemes to sap their strength, will and courage. The results of 50 years of socialism are now clear to see.

Mr. Blair seems to at some level sense this, and perhaps he realises that holding on to Brussels will simply result in an uncontrollable downward spiral for Britain. It is sad to see how far you folks have fallen from the English Bill of Rights of 1689.

Your arguments about war are empty unless you first assess the threat to western civilisation, namely 1,400 years of *Jihad*, and what western civilisation is going to have to do to prevent places like the Vatican, Notre Dame, Cologne Cathedral and Westminster from becoming mosques, and all Christians and libertarians put to death.

Perhaps you know of an alternative way to face down the 7th century barbarians who have sworn to destroy western civilisation. If you do, please share it. I do agree that we need vigorous debate on this topic, and that we're not getting it. In my view, it is the anti-war crowd that is devoid of ideas, saying only that "you have to allow the inspectors more time" and other idiocies.

So far, you simply sound like Neville Chamberlain or Bill Clinton.

Sean Gabb and the War with Iraq: A Reply in Three Parts
J. Neil Schulman <jneil@pulpless.com>

Part 1

Sean,

Has it crossed your mind that the only reason the president of the United States wants Britain and other countries as an ally in the war against Iraq is that the US doesn't want to act like an empire?

An empire run by someone like Julius Caesar would have cut a deal with Saddam Hussein to let him keep Kuwait as long as he sold us cheap oil.

An empire run by someone like Mao, Hitler, or Stalin would have dropped neutron bombs on all the Middle East oil fields years ago, and taken the fields for our own.

It's a strange empire that allowed presidents like Carter and Clinton to stand down much of our military so that we had to wait as long as we have to have time to rebuild our forces so we could take care of a pipsqueak like Saddam Hussein.

Neil

Part 2

Sean,

I just read your general reply to critics. You raise a number of provocative issues. Let me respond to some of them.

King George III should have listened to Edmund Burke. If you guys had simply given the Americans full representation in Parliament, that nasty revolution of 1776 would never have happened. As it happened, the American revolution was the best thing that ever happened to Britain, because in many ways we have been the conservators of the rights and liberties of the Englishman over the subsequent two-plus centuries. I credit this to the genius of men like Franklin, Jefferson, Madison, Mason, and even my least favourite of our founders, Hamilton. The separation

of powers of the Constitution of the United States was a fair-to-middling good idea. But the Bill of Rights was sheer genius, especially including the Second Amendment. It preserved the orneriness of the American people past all reason. Only a nation of gun nuts raised on myths about the old west and John Wayne movies could have withstood the onslaught of the statism of European intellectuals, and the threats of both fascism and communism. Franklin Roosevelt was the best shot statism had at destroying the United States as it was originally constituted. We suffered damage but the nation was left largely intact, with one change: instead of being a federation of sovereign states, we became truly a single nation, which - even through the struggle against segregation - emerged, finally, as a country which really believed in embracing ethnic and cultural diversity.

America is no longer a country or a defined territory. It is an idea. That idea, launched by you guys and field tested by us, was best phrased in the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. - That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, -That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organising its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

I consider these to be the most important words ever written in human history. It is not merely a declaration applicable to a particular time and place. The least important thing about it is the secession of colonies from its homeland. It is a statement of how human affairs should be organised, and is as applicable in Asia - or on Mars - as it was to Massachusetts and Virginia.

America is the saviour of English liberty, fairness, and justice. Your country, your empire, had a good idea in bringing civilisation to the savages, in raising them up, and - despite the racialism of the phrase - there is something noble about "white man's burden" - so long as one understands that being a white man is a philosophical abstraction and has nothing whatsoever to do with one's parentage, skin colour, racial characteristics, or genetics. The lesson which America has to teach the world is that anyone can be a "white "Englishman" - even a person of 100 per cent Chinese stock or a woman who is so mixed we can't tell by looking what her ethnicity is.

People throughout the world think America's foreign policy is imperialistic or economically venal. No doubt we have as fair a share of scoundrels in business overseas as you did. But the thing is, we really do believe the unbelievably utopian patriotic slogans we chant. We really do want the entire world to enjoy the same liberties we do. It distresses us that women are treated like shit in the Middle East. We don't like it when Israel starts beating up on other people the way they used to get beat up on. Even our felons get it when a microphone is shoved in front of his mouth during a riot, and his first thought is, "Can't we all just get along?"

If the United States moves into Iraq, it will not be to enrich our oil companies. If all our politicians cared about were protecting our business interests, they wouldn't pass laws preventing us from pumping oil out of vast resources in our own country, merely because it might despoil the ecology of an empty wasteland. If the United States moves into Iraq, it will not be for the glory of empire. Americans are too isolationist and lazy to want to be an empire. If the United States moves into Iraq, it will be out of disgust, because the taste of vomit in our throats, caused by observing the misery caused by a bunch of brutal gangsters, is intolerable to us. If American foreign policy is based on anything, it's based on how God acted in the Old Testament. Sodom and Gomorrah? Get the good people to safety then rain hellfire on the bastards. If it's good enough for God, it's good enough for America.

Is that arrogant? Hubristic? Probably. Will it lead to our own destruction? Who can tell?

But at least understand the idealism which motivates us. It may be folly but it's not evil.

Neil

Part 3

Sean,

My last reply to you, sent earlier today, was on basic principles; I didn't deal with the specifics of your objections to war with Iraq.

Let me do so now.

From a libertarian standpoint, any murderous dictator or party of dictators is ripe for overthrow at any moment. By committing acts of mass murder, torture, and tyranny, they have long forfeited any rights they might have. Libertarians only need ask whether the parasite can be killed without also destroying the host, and whether there is some reason other than altruism for someone not under their thumb to spend their lives and treasure on killing the parasite.

I don't need any proof that Saddam Hussein is building up stores of biological or chemical weapons, or attempting to have nukes, or importing powerful rocket engines, to regard him as a threat not only to his region but to ours. You focus on the lack of dead babies in incubators in some attempt to show that we were engaging in propaganda. How about this: Saddam Hussein, after invading and occupying Kuwait, and having been driven out of it only by force, set the Kuwaiti oil fields on fire and ordered oil to be dumped into the Arabian sea. No one other than Red Adair could have put out these oil fires, and it took his crews over a year. As for that oil spill, which was deliberate, it was ten times larger than the accidental spill of the Exxon Valdez, which until then had been considered one of the largest acts of ecological disaster in modern history. Saddam Hussein is the undefeated champion of Ecoterrorism. Or, if you want it put in libertarian terms, not only is he a murderer and torturer and tyrant, but he's also a megathief and a megavandal.

What, other than hatred of the United States, motivates opposition to separating this vile piece of human garbage from his power? Why should not any passing *posse comitatus* hunt him and his minions down and hang them? Why is this imperialism rather than an act of mercy, an act of compassion, an act of liberation, and act of justice?

How did this plague of blindness spread so far that libertarians have been taken in by the left, which hates America not for its mistakes but for its virtues?

Neil

J. Neil Schulman is one of the most famous living American libertarians, with a string of books and articles testifying to his brilliance as a writer.

War and the Rumours of Wars
Edward Spalton <e.spalton@btopenworld.com>

War, as von Clausewitz famously said is "The continuation of policy by other means" and its aim is "to impose one's will on the enemy" . I do detest the lies which our government has used. Everyone seems to be agreed on policy - to get rid of Saddam -but just a touch queasy about the means. In the case of the attack on Yugoslavia, I could see through them pretty quickly and knew

1. That Milosevic and the Serbs were certainly no worse than the other leaders & groups
2. That the KLA, a highly criminal organisation, was being supplied, trained and led by the German Secret Service in operations designed to provoke reprisals.
3. Up to the bombing campaign of NATO, the reported deaths in Kosovo were at a lower level per head of population than at many times in Northern Ireland.
4. That NATO air power had been used in 1995 to "ethnically cleanse" the Krajina region of Croatia of some 300,000 Serbs and hardly anyone raised an outcry.
5. That the Rambouillet negotiations were a farce with a military protocol inserted at the last minute, which was a demand for unconditional surrender such as no country could accept.

I could go on.

Yet, I find it hard to get into a state of moral outrage over an attack on Saddam. Still less do I find the fig leaf of yet another UN resolution a convincing necessity. The UN is probably more corrupt than the EU. I believe Saddam is in breach of some 17 resolutions (but have not checked that myself). How many more are necessary, assuming that is the *casus belli* which is to be chosen?

If America is the great, big bully portrayed (and it is certainly very great and big in armaments), why did they stop short of Baghdad 12 years ago? I don't know the answer but I know that Colin Powell got an awful lot of flak for it in subsequent years. When he was appointed Sec of State, the Democrats attacked him for being a softy and not willing enough to chuck America's weight about in the pursuit of "Global Order" .

An acquaintance of mine, whom I respect very much, has gone to Baghdad as a "human shield" . He comes from a family with a high sense of duty - his father won a VC. I don't (in theory!) mind if I die for Queen and Country and, whilst casualties are always tragic, I have to accept that members of our forces will die whilst doing their duty of killing the Queen's enemies - but I would hate to die or to have British soldiers die for Tony Blair!

However, I think it is essential to be "best friends" with the USA as we will need America as a counterpoise to "Old Europe" in the not too distant future. . If the price of that is what used to be called a "punitive expedition" to topple the present Iraqi *régime* and instal something more benign (which everyone else claims to want to do), then it may be a necessary evil - even if it gives that moral defective, Blair, a brief moment of glory.

Which Church was it that was "neither hot nor cold"? That is rather how I feel about the war. I will take bets that the French, after their highly principled speeches, will join the war as soon as it starts so to be in on whatever spoils are going! They have such barefaced cheek! I think it's called "Gallic realism"!

Hunting Paedophiles in England: More Comments
Edward Spalton <e.spalton@btopenworld.com>

Dear Sean,

I have read your article "Hunting Paedophiles in England: Present Madness, Future Shame". I agree with most of your articles and think your analysis in this case is mostly right - although I am not as

libertarian as you. I would like to see the amount of porn in newsagents shops much reduced and think that a degree of censorship is actually desirable. You only have to look at the "women's" magazines targeted at early teenagers to get a good idea as to where our huge crop of bastards on the parish originates. That affects my liberty by taking away my money for their keep and ensures a further generation of ne'er-do-wells. In her earlier days my sister, a social worker, argued that what is generally termed "permissiveness" was only extending to the lower classes the fun and frolics which had previously been enjoyed by the nobility and gentry and she appeared to see herself as some sort of custodian for this "liberation" - which, incidentally, also generated much increased career prospects for social workers and the like.

If you ask *cui bono?* about the paedophile witch-hunt, you come up with the same answer - "the caring professionals" - social workers, specialist police units, witness service etc etc. It was some years ago that a dotty doctor and her colleagues were slinging hundreds of babies and small children into care because she/ they were convinced that they had an infallible test for (mostly parental) child abuse. Stuart Bell MP took up the case against these zealots very effectively. But in the meantime literally hundreds of parents had been separated from their children (and, of course, vice-versa) - no doubt creating "trauma" in all concerned which would create further demand for "caring professionals" and counsellors.

My sister, now retired, is actually a fairly common sense person (she even supports hunting!). Yet during this bout of official madness, she told me "All my friends have found recovered memories of abuse" (nearly all her friends are lady social workers). "I'm sure I must have been abused but I have not been able to recall it". It was like mass hysteria, running round a girls' school. These worthy ladies were all in possession of huge and practically irresistible powers over the parents and children who became their "clients".

In another, unrelated case a local authority Councillor told me how a Social Work Department had forced a father and husband to leave his wife, children and home against his wife's wishes with the threat that if he resisted, they would take the children into care and place them for adoption. They then worked on his wife to persuade her to a feminist, anti-patriarchal point of view and she had to appear to agree to being "empowered" in this way in order to get the family together again. Power of this sort is very sweet to its practitioners . (You only have to consider how Social Work Departments hang on to children put up for adoption - it gives them such huge power over potential adopters.) - not to mention the well-paid jobs!

As with the training of teachers, there are those who have a profound agenda to be "change agents" in society rather than simply to do the job as specified. One priority in the social field is the destruction of the self-sufficient family which transmits non-governmental, non politically correct values. It is, in fact, one of the basic "forces of conservatism" -And there are even those with official Conservative labels who favour destroying it too - in favour of the Clarkeite/Portillista/ born-again Bercow version. If you destroy the family, you inevitably destroy the nation.

**Best
Edward**

wishes,

Hunting Paedophiles in England: More Comments
Mandy Ace <pca_1978@yahoo.co.uk>

Dear

Mr

Gabb

I read the article "Hunting Paedophiles in England: Present Madness, Future Shame" on your web site with interest.

In it, you mention that the requirement to discuss paedophilia in 'luridly condemnatory terms' is reminiscent of the treatment witchcraft received.

It is pretty easy to point out similarities with medieval witch-hunts. But people will reply by saying things like 'there were no witches in medieval times, and there are paedophiles now' as if the modern paedophile 'witch-hunt' is nothing of the sort, but a rational reaction to a real problem.

In many ways, your article has something of the same approach. It touches upon child 'pornography' and the attempts to suppress it under law and discusses these laws as though they are simply illiberal.

While not disagreeing with you, I would also like to point out that they are also being applied irrationally, and in this way the paedophile 'witch-hunt' becomes even more like real witch-hunts.

There are two applicable laws, the Protection of Children Act 1978 and the Criminal Justice Act 1988. As they stood, they dealt simply with indecent photographs of children. These photographs do not need to be pornographic – the level of indecency required for a photograph of a child to be indecent is not specified, leading to the possibility of criminalising normal family photographs – see the many problems encountered by the Saatchi gallery under the Protection of Children Act (*The Guardian*, 18 December 2002, 'Gallery faces prosecution over picture of a girl in the bath', http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,861928,00.html).

However, both Acts amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. The intention here was to make explicit the equivalence of images stored on computers with physical photographs. However, it also criminalised 'indecent pseudo-photographs', which (as you mention) are 'images that may have been produced without the involvement of any child'.

This is the situation you discuss in your article as being illiberal.

However, the real situation is far more than illiberal – it is absurd.

Scotland Yard said that it had arrested Pete Townsend under the Protection of Children Act 1978 on "suspicion of possessing indecent images of children, suspicion of making indecent images of children and suspicion of incitement to distribute indecent images of children."

'Possessing indecent images of children' is covered by the Criminal Justice Act, NOT the Protection of Children Act; 'incitement to distribute indecent images of children' is absurd (at least in this case); and 'making indecent images of children' is the principle source of absurdity in the law as it is currently applied.

In brief, the problem is as follows.

Mr Townsend is alleged to have 'made indecent photographs of children' by downloading them from the net. The Court of Appeal has held (a) that images stored in computer files are 'copies of photographs' and (b) that 'making' means cause to exist.

When Mr Townsend allegedly downloaded an image from the 'net, a copy of that image was 'caused to exist' on his computer.

The legal justification for this is section 7(2) of the Protection of Children Act: 'References to an indecent photograph include an indecent film, a copy of an indecent photograph or film, and an indecent photograph comprised in a film.'

The Court of Appeal reached this conclusion by answering 'Yes' to the question 'does downloading a photograph from the net cause a copy of that photograph to exist on the computer doing the downloading?'

However, there is a section of the Act that is happily ignored here.

7. — (4) References to a photograph include — (a) the negative as well as the positive version; and (b) data stored on a computer disc or by other electronic means which is capable of conversion into a photograph.

A photograph stored in a computer file is therefore NOT a 'copy of a photograph' but (obviously) 'data stored on a computer disc... which is capable of conversion into a photograph'.

The question the Court SHOULD have asked is 'has the data downloaded to the disc of the computer doing the downloading been caused to exist by the act of downloading?'

The answer is obviously 'No'.

Therefore, downloading an image from the Internet is not 'making an indecent photograph of a child' as the Court has concluded.

I discuss this, and some further complications, on my webpage www.geocities.com/pca_1978.

Then there is the 'Sexual Offences Bill 2003'. This proposes legal authorisation for the police to 'make indecent photographs of children'. One supposes this is to allow them to investigate 'Internet kiddie porn' without themselves committing an offence. However, according to the 10th edition of the Concise Oxford Dictionary, a photograph is 'a picture made by a camera' – will the police be allowed to take indecent photographs of children? Obviously that is not the intention, but it is implied by the words.

This authorisation also makes it entirely obvious that downloading an image from the net causes no harm to anyone. It is only an offence when committed by the 'paedophile'. It is not an action that makes one a 'paedophile'. It is the state of mind of the person committing the act that is criminalised, NOT the act itself.

The Bill also proposes increasing from 16 to 18 the age that the subject of the photograph (OR pseudo-photograph) must be before an image is considered to be an indecent photograph of a child.

There is a defence to 'taking an indecent photograph of a child (i.e. person under 18)' where the child is over 16 and the person taking the photograph has the consent of the child.

That same person has a defence to distribute or show that photograph – but only to the child who is also the subject of that photograph.

However, the child DOES not have a defence to a charge of 'possession of an indecent photograph of a child' when taking possession of that photograph.

This will further put the lie to the claim that every indecent photograph is a photograph of a child being sexually abused – it will become a criminal offence to possess photographs of people performing acts that it is perfectly legal for them to perform.

If, despite being incorrect, the current interpretation of the law (downloading = making) remains, downloading photographs of naked 17 year olds will become an offence that can put you in jail for 10 years!

So, I think you are correct to say that in the future people will look back to the current period of 'paedophile hysteria' and consider it to be shameful.

Best Regards,

Mark H.

Editor's Note: *I have been unable to discover the true identity of Mandy Ace or Mark H. Perhaps I should have looked more carefully on the relevant web site. Or perhaps I should have asked. But idleness and a deadline prevented me. However, this is an interesting article.*

**Would You Vote for this Deity?
And Would He Even Want You to?
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Every so often, an overly optimistic secular humanist will jump the proverbial gun and proclaim - in a fit of the sort of wishful thinking for which us progressive types may so often be easily identified - that the intellectuals of the world have finally established something of a beachhead in the struggle between science and faith, that only a short "mopping-up" campaign remains before the contemporary incarnations of organised religion are relegated to the status currently held by the Norse pantheon and pamphlets on crystal healing. "Theology" will soon be reclassified as "mythology," young children will be taught to fear only oncoming traffic, strangers with candy, and discarded syringes, and that will be the end of it.

Socrates might have presumably believed something of the sort, at least until the voting public of Athens convinced him otherwise with a swift execution by lethal concoction; Clarence Darrow, having achieved the miraculous feat of beating portly fundamentalist and notorious serial candidate William Jennings Bryan in a rational debate (if not in the actual legal proceedings), certainly couldn't have helped but feel the end was nigh for the fire-and-brimstone crowd; and I myself, though having not yet achieved anything on par with being executed or chosen to represent the side of reason in a national courtroom spectacle, share at least one trait with those two revered fellows, having admittedly succumbed to moments of wild abandon in which I've predicted the total and inevitable victory of urban bookstore patrons over rural connoisseurs of porcelain angels. But then, I'm something of an idiot.

Stupid as I may be, though, I do take a certain pride in having my finger on the pulse of the nation. And the reality of the situation is that God is coming back in a big way, and has never been very far from the centre of things to begin with. Public and press alike agree that the post-September 11 America (if the reader will excuse an overused but nonetheless indispensable phrase) is a more religious America; even if the destruction of the nation's tallest buildings produced few conversions to That Old Time Religion, it is generally acknowledged that this most striking of events did remind a good number of sinners to go to church every once in a while and, as far as I can tell, to

write letters to their local newspapers in which the collective readership of said publications is strongly urged to put God and family over hedge funds and cute secretaries.

Not that religion needed such a boost, at least not in this part of the globe. Between articles on Ritalin and the latest arthritis treatments, Time has of late managed to find time to commission a series of polls by which it was revealed that a good deal more than half of all Americans believe that the Bible is a literal account of God, His life and times. Even (or perhaps especially) George W. Bush, leader of the Free World and personal secretary to Dick Cheney, is certainly quite a fan of Yahweh, having cited His temporal incarnation Jesus Christ as his greatest influence. Jesus, as he told the nation during the fight for the Republican candidacy, came into his heart and set him free, presumably around the time that George quit drinking. And even the most hopeless news addict would be hard-pressed to come across a speech by the president in which the world's most popular deity is not praised, evoked, or generally spoken highly of. God, it seems, is bigger than the Beatles.

To believe in such a god as Yahweh - an all-knowing, all-seeing, infinitely wise creator deity with a line on all that is good and true - is to defer to his judgment, in theory if not in practice. Certainly one who believes in such an entity would make a point not to disagree with him on matters of theory, however one chooses to act in practice; one does not split hairs when dealing with the omnipotent.

From this it may be logically inferred that one who believes in both the God of the Testaments and the democracy of western civilisation probably finds no contradiction in this dual-citizenship of ideology, although there's no need to come to such a conclusion through logical analysis alone - anyone who's ever read a newspaper can't help but be aware that religious Americans believe our nation to be endorsed by God, its fundamental foundations similarly sanctioned by Him, its success a result of His goodwill. Simply ask any churchgoer - or even someone who only aspires to be - and he's certain to inform you that God is democracy's biggest fan.

But let us go out on a limb and assume for a moment that these fellow citizens of ours may be wrong on this point. After all, would it be unwise to examine a major premise of our collective political consciousness when nothing less than the proper use of an unprecedented position of global might is at stake? Sillier arguments (with less opportunity for alliteration) have been undertaken; thus I would like to submit to the reader that the concept of representative government - as well as many of the key ideals so integral to modern civilisation that they may be agreed upon by capitalist and socialist alike - is contrary to the policies of God as described by the religious texts that these literalists hold to be infallible.

Whether he be statesman or deity, determining a subject's political affiliation is a simple enough matter; one need only look at the record. The overriding ideology of any revolutionary figure may be reasonably ascertained without reading a single word of the chap's manifestos, proclamations, or revolutionary pamphlets. Instead, it is necessary only to examine the sort of government this fellow ended up creating. Through this fairly self-evident method, it may be ascertained with a great deal of certainty that Lenin was probably a communist, having established the USSR; Hitler, most likely, was a fascist, having established the Nazi regime over Germany; and Jefferson and his drinking buddies were all certainly republicans to one degree or another - a very small degree, in the case of Hamilton.

Yahweh, it is often forgotten, also once engaged in a bout of nation-building (an activity usually frowned upon by his admirers in the Republican Party, particularly when it's done by a Democrat); the result of this experiment, as related in the Torah, was the Kingdom of Israel. Those well-versed in the nuances of the Old Testament will take note that the Republic of Israel is nowhere to be

found; similarly, there is no mention in the scriptures of any People's Republic of Israel, with its myriad kibbutzim and drab collective delis. Indeed, if either of these two entities has ever existed, history seems to have totally overlooked the both of them, while oddly taking note of such seemingly trivial facts as how many wives King Solomon had (more than I do, as it turns out). Having had the chance to form a government conducive to His particular sensibilities, Yahweh opted for absolute monarchy over the more imaginative forms of social contracts which were to come later - the social contract, for instance. One must wonder at His lack of originality. Monarchy had already been done to death by the time this not-entirely-noble experiment rolled around in the 11th century B.C. In fact, this was pretty much the only form of political association to be found anywhere at the time, aside from the whole "roving band of horse-mounted barbarians" setup, which would have provided better opportunity for an active lifestyle.

Yahweh, being Yahweh, certainly couldn't have been ignorant of other potential governmental institutions; even without His ability to see the future, the God of the Hebrews should have had no problem thinking up something that the Greek mob would accidentally hit upon a few hundred years later and that John Locke would eventually rediscover and legitimatise.

There's no getting around it: Yahweh knew of democracy but somehow neglected to mention any such concept to his followers. He certainly had ample opportunity, this being the era in which He was in the midst of His yakkity-yak, "Do this, do that, conquer those chaps over there" phase. Yahweh was indeed a blue-blooded monarchist, a fact that the kings of Europe would later seize upon, spiff up, and hold aloft as Biblical support for the "Divine Right of Kings" concept. Louis XIV was right on the money - God was in his corner all along.

Not only is Yahweh a diehard opponent of any sort of representative government; he would also be a poor candidate for government representative of any sort. The sheer number of scandals, missteps, and archaic policy positions that He is credited with in both the Old and New Testaments would make a Trent Lott presidency seem quite feasible.á

By far the most damning of these views is God's well-documented tolerance of slavery among His people. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's," Yahweh tells the Hebrews in Exodus 20:17, putting human chattel in the same category as real estate. By the way, that bit about coveting your neighbour's ass refers to donkeys; scattered condemnations of homosexuality may be found elsewhere.

To be fair, God was at least on the level of the 19th century southern plantation apologist; in several instances, the benevolent slaveholder is urged to treat his property with kindness, or at least as much kindness as one is ever likely to come across in the Old Testament. "And if a man smite his servant," he warns in Exodus 21:20-21, "or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished. Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished: for he is his money [property]." Meaning that beating the dickens out of a "servant" is all well and good, but if he should die that same day, some unspecified punishment awaits the owner. Perhaps his driver's license is revoked for a period not to exceed 90 days. But should the slave not die from his wounds until a few days later, the master is in the clear. Understandably, Bush's speechwriters tend to skip over this particular passage when trying to inject a little religious fervour into the president's weekly radio address.

As for women's suffrage, little examination is necessary. Though the Bible mentions no specific injunction against females voting (seeing as how very little voting was going on at the time), there are several passages to be found in which wives are commanded to obey their husbands in all matters. Unlike God's position on the slavery issue, which modern pastors make a point to overlook

when composing a sermon for the following Sunday, the majority of literalists still have a tendency to shout this particular commandment from the rooftops - or from the bleachers, as is the case when the Promise Keepers come to town and reserve entire football stadiums for their pseudo-masculine sob-fests. Anyway, one may conjecture that in the event of an election, a married man's vote would count twice. This is actually quite a progressive setup when you consider that slaves in the American south were each granted the status of only 3/5 of a person when it came time to divvy up the House of Representatives. So, kudos, Yahweh.

Aside from such glaring forms of political suicide as anti-abolitionism and a stance on women's rights that makes Phyllis Schlafly look like Betty Friedan, there are a number of lesser but nonetheless damning incidents to be found in the Bible. Fundamentalist Republicans who were so concerned about the character issue during the Clinton presidency would do well to read the book of Job, a summary of which follows here:

God: Hey, Satan, this Job fellow sure is a loyal Hebrew.

Satan: I bet he'd ditch you in a second if he didn't have it so well made.

God: You're on! Watch me kill his family and give him the Middle Eastern equivalent of herpes!

Job: God damnit.

Satan: See? He took your name in vain.

God: Wait, it's not over yet. (Explains to Job why He had to kill off his loved ones in order to win a bet with the devil)

Job: I see. I guess you're really a just god after all.

God: Right. Now here's a new wife.

Job: Hey, a blonde! I don't care what the Philistines say; you're alright, Yahweh!

God: Hey, Satan, where's my five bucks?

And all Pete Rose did was make a friendly little wager on a few ballgames.

Having failed several essential political litmus tests, having had all of his "youthful indiscretions" recorded and so widely distributed that they may be found in the drawer of every hotel room bedside table on the planet, and having failed to appear on an MTV special in order to get His hands on some of the youth vote, how is it that God still reigns as America's unofficial Elder Statesman, a Washington insider of the highest sort whose approval is sought out on matters ranging from abortion to gun control to genetic engineering? Is this some kind of bizarre aberration, one of those rare political "stays of execution", the kind we only grant to such formerly evil but undeniably loveable figures as Strom Thurmond?

Hardly. Our fellow citizens are proverbial for their lack of consistency. Ted Kennedy attended a small gathering with a bunch of shapely campaign workers, got drunk, attempted to drive the girl to a suitable mating nest, drove off a bridge, left her to suffocate in a rapidly-shrinking air pocket, neglected to call authorities about it until a makeshift cover-up could be implemented, and then got re-elected about a dozen times since.

On the other hand, Gary Hart got caught fooling around with some chick on a boat, and this is probably the first time you've seen his name in print since 1988.

The lesson is clear. God, like Ted Kennedy, has made a deal with the devil.

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