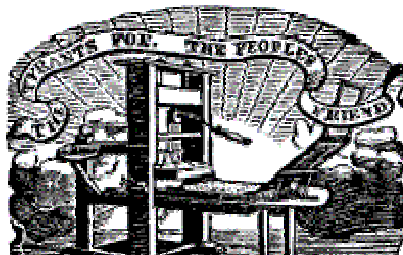


FREE LIFE

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**Editorial:
Agreeing to Disagree
Sean Gabb**

This war has divided just about every movement of which I am a member. It has divided libertarians, conservatives, and Eurosceptics. To be fair, it seems also to have divided every other movement that pays any regard to politics, not to mention, families, friends, neighbours, and colleagues. In all my life - and it has now been reasonably long - I cannot recall an event that had so peculiar and sometimes painful an effect.

The reasons for this are various, and I cannot list all of them, nor boast that I even understand them all. One, though is the realignment of politics that Steve Davies and I have been discussing for the past few months. Before now, the cement holding together the structure of political debate was too strongly set to allow the fragmentation we have just seen.

Another is the medium available for expressing disagreement. I was equally opposed to the first Gulf War in 1991, and I had friends who supported it as strongly as they have this one. In those days, however, we saw each other hardly once a fortnight, if that; and we could choose to discuss other matters. But we are now joined almost permanently together by the Internet, and this is a medium that compels debate while denying us the personal contact that would otherwise moderate the force of debate. It has also allowed me to outline my grounds of dissent from my friends more fully than would have been possible for me in the past. Unless I had had the luxury of a column in a daily newspaper, there would have been no point in my writing so many words on the war, both as it approached and as it was played out.

It is a trite but just observation, that we live in an age made strange by new technology. I believe that the technology has enriched us, and will continue to do so. But we need to bear in mind that it does place strains on relationships that would once have been unthinkable apart from within small communities or within those with privileged access to the media. We now all have such privileged access, and are all brought into small communities.

The debate, of course, is not over. There are fundamental differences of opinion, and these will continue to be expressed for the remaining time of the war and its more visible consequences.

This being so, those of us on what is loosely and inaccurately called “the right” of politics need to remember that there is still more to unite than to divide us. Whatever we may think about the American alliance, and the reality of the danger allegedly presented to us by the Government of Iraq, or whatever, we do still believe in personal freedom within a constitutional order separate from that of the European Union. Some dangers to what we want may have been lessened by the war. Others have increased. We must never suppress our differences over the rightness or wisdom of what has happened during the past few months. At the same time, we must not allow them to reduce our effectiveness in other, perhaps more important, issues.

I do not think I have expressed any personal rancour to those within the Movement with whom I disagree. Certainly, I have not heard any expressed to me. But if I have uttered words that anyone has found offensive, I apologise now. One of the benefits of a true education is that it enables people to disagree while never losing sight of deeper communities of interests and ideals.

My friend and proprietor Dr Tame will issue a pronouncement in the next issue of *Free Life*, clarifying the lack of any set position on the war or on any other aspect of foreign policy, and on the undesirability of any such line. Though he has not yet made his pronouncement, I will use the

remainder of this Editorial to welcome it. *Free Life Commentary* is mine, and contains my own opinions and nothing but. *Free Life*, on the other hand, is the journal of the Libertarian Alliance. As such, it is open to all opinions. It always has been, and I hope always will be.

The Lessons of History
by Sean Gabb
(First Published as *Free Life Commentary*,
issue 96, 22nd March 2003)

Whatever the more nihilistic historians may claim, history does reveal certain regularities in our behaviour. One of these is that, whenever large numbers of intelligent people agree that it can only get better, the world takes a turn decidedly for the worse. The poets of the Augustan age saw that the present was better than the past, and thought the good times would continue. Instead, the Roman world got Tiberius, Caligula, Nero and Domitian. When Constantine became a Christian, Eusebius insisted this would herald an age of peace and justice. Within a century, Augustine was having to write at immense length to show how this had only apparently not happened. The Enlightenment is famous for its optimism, and we all know it ended with the Terror and a quarter century of bloodletting across Europe. The Victorian belief in progress was knocked on the head at the Somme and Passchendael, and quietly expired in the extermination camps and the *Gulag*.

Then, after 1945, the unexpected happened. During the central decades of the last century, good writers competed to chill our blood with their predictions for the future. We were promised *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty Four*, and *Fahrenheit 451*. What in fact we got was penicillin, birth control pills and the Internet, all of which have greatly - even if in the case of the latter two ambiguously - contributed much to the jollity of life. For much of Europe, and all those areas of the world settled by the European races, we have now had almost 60 years of spectacular progress. And if we like occasionally to frighten ourselves that this will be ended by AIDS, or global warming, or nuclear winters, or asteroid impacts, or whatever, hardly anyone seriously believes it ever will end.

Time, therefore, to start worrying - that is, if history does indeed teach anything.

As I write - and events do change unpredictably in such times - the war with Iraq is going rather well in the military sense. The Iraqis seem to be throwing down their weapons, and not too many civilians may have been killed. Perhaps the Allies will roll into Baghdad next week, and various unshaven thugs will crawl out of their bunkers ready to rebrand themselves as liberal democrats and to take American bribes for keeping the lid on things.

But this is not to say that the invasion was ever in principle a good idea in. Imagine, my dear readers, that you run a business. What would you think if your chief clerk raided the petty cash, placed the lot on some horse, won against terrible odds, and then offered to share his winnings with you? Would you slap him on the back and buy him a copy of *The Racing Post*? Or would you continue dialling the police? I think the answer is obvious. Just because Messrs Bush and Blair may - and I still use the subjunctive - have got away with their latest gamble, is no reason to suppose that they will continue their run of luck. And I do still doubt if it will really turn out, after a few years, that they have got away with it.

Unlike spots and bad breath, high civilisation is not something that comes about naturally for us. It is a product of depressingly unusual circumstances. These circumstances cannot be created by act of human will, though they can be destroyed; and they cannot be called back once they have gone.

Taken together, the Anglo-Saxon powers are undeniably the better part of mankind. We have most of the intelligence, most of the enterprise, and therefore most of the money and power. We can in the short term get whatever we firmly decide to have. But I do not believe that we have either the means or - just as importantly - the will to keep getting what our establishment intellectuals tell us we ought to be wanting.

To be specific, we cannot act more than spasmodically as the policeman of the world. We cannot because we are not the same as the Romans. We British tried to do it, and did sort of succeed for a time. But we managed only while no one else had railway trains or steel factories or big shipyards, and because we had a ruling class that had Vergil and Livy beaten into it generation after generation. But - while it was undoubtedly good for the world while it lasted - the *Pax Britannica* began to crumble at the first serious challenge. It was shown to be overtrading as early as the South African War. By the 1920s, it was looking for a genteel excuse to downsize. In 1940, the insolvency petition was filed; and the only question after that was which parts should be liquidated and which put into the administrative receivership of the Americans.

As for the Americans, they cannot even begin. The neo-conservatives in Washington may be delighted with the present turn of events, and I am sure are quoting Kipling to each other about the white man's burden. But America is neither Rome nor even Britain. It is England without the old ruling class. It is the place to which people ran away to look after their own gardens - the City on the Hill, the nation of friendship to all but entangling alliances with none. To be sure, the American people will fight if they think they are attacked or are about to be. But they have not the virtues, or perhaps the vices, needed for settled imperialism. Their ideal is the detached house in the suburbs, the two cars in the garage, the barbecues in the sun. They will not, like the Spartan mothers, send their sons off to endless wars with the injunction to return with or on their shields. That is why they ran away from Vietnam and Lebanon and Somalia, and will probably not stay long in Afghanistan and Iraq.

This is not to pour scorn on the Americans, but just to say what sort of people they are. A nation aware of its weaknesses may be said to have no weaknesses - for it will avoid showing the need to display them. The Americans have created the greatest of all commercial civilisations - a place where the good life is within the reach of anyone who will work for it. But they are not the new Romans. The same, if with obvious reservations, is true of us. At best, we can act spasmodically as if we were. And to do anything spasmodically is generally worse than not to do it at all.

There is the danger to civilisation. Perhaps if it were the new Rome, America - or America-plus-Anglosphere - could settle down to remake the world to its own taste. But it is not. All it can do is make tremendous periodic messes, and then walk away from them at the first ebbing of enthusiasm. For all we may pity them, the lesser breeds without the law will be better off in the long term if we simply leave them alone.

If we do get out of this war without suffering most of the consequences we richly deserve, the lesson must be not to get ourselves into another one. Our civilisation will not survive a whole run of such wars. And this is why - always leaving Mr Bush to his own people - it is so important to remember the man whose vanity and lack of judgement got us into the war, and at the earliest opportunity to remove him. *Ceterum censeo Antonium esse delendum.*

The Lessons of History: Reply to Sean Gabb
Ken Nebel <ken1@chartermi.net>

Sean:

I majored in History at Yale back in the 1960s, and actually thought I knew a thing or two. My understanding of European history was totally shattered when, after 9-11, I discovered Paul Fregosi's engaging book, *Jihad in the West*. This book, which was to have been published in England until the publisher backed out of the deal because of Islamic threats (a fine word in itself about freedom of speech in England today) was finally published in America by a more courageous publisher, Prometheus.

Did you know that America won the War of 1812 against Britain mainly because of Arab terrorists and rogue states? It's true. After we lost the protection of the British Navy upon gaining independence, our merchant ships in the Mediterranean were mercilessly set upon by rogue Islamic states (aka Barbary Pirates: but they were the Saddams of 200 years ago) and their crews held for huge ransoms, and if not ransomed, enslaved. So America's first foreign war was to kick Arab ass. The 5 frigates built to sail halfway around the world to subdue the dey of Algiers, Tripoli and other places turned out to be decisive against the British Navy 10 years later.

At any rate, our history has been affected by Islam's 1400 year long war against Western Civilization much more than any of my history books have said, and the Moorish reign in Spain was much more bloodthirsty and cruel in its treatment of Jews and Christians than any of my other books, which tend to praise the great Arabic universities at Seville and elsewhere, point out. The saga of the 750 years of the Spanish *reconquista* alone is worth the reading.

It appears to me that only a very few of the world's leaders - George Bush, Tony Blair, Donald Rumsfeld and a few others - seem to understand this lesson of history. Thankfully, the majority of Congress and Parliament, although they are empty headed politicians, are savvy enough to at least go along with their leaders. I do have to say I am deeply disappointed in Ron Paul, who I have met a couple of times, who voted yesterday against supporting our troops. I thought he was smarter than that.

The 1400-year lesson is: Principles or no, those who fail to stand up to militant Islam militarily are slaughtered and enslaved. Ever it has been since 632, and ever it shall be.

And it's not just in the West. Visit www.geocities.com/listislam and check out the history of the Hindu Holocaust. One of the fascinating aspects of Arabic conquest is that the history of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is not isolated. Wherever they conquer, Muslims take over the holy places of other religions (Haga Sophia and the Taj Mahal come to mind) and turn them into mosques. Over 900 former churches in the UK have already met this fate, as have thousands of former Hindu and Sikh temples in India and Pakistan. The Hindu Holocaust Museum's site is an interesting one.

My basic principles are Jeffersonian and Lockean. However, I have to temper my government minimalizing principles with the knowledge that Thomas Jefferson sent the US Navy and Marines to Lebanon and other Arab lands to deal with Arab terrorists. Could Tony and George simply be following the lead of the 3rd President of the United States?

Thinking people on this side of the pond definitely understand that militant Islam demands a physically strong response, just as your government had no choice but to jail the Imam of Finsbury Park in order to shut him up. Winston Churchill knew this but was not supported by the people, who preferred to think that Chamberlain's policies of appeasement had a chance of succeeding. Ever it is. Bill Clinton was the Neville Chamberlain of the 1990s, and we are now reaping the bitter harvest. North Korea is next, I fear.

Ken
Duluth, MN

Nebel

American Casualties of the War
Thomas Leavitt <thomasleavitt@hotmail.com>

Sean,

According to the United States Federal Department of Veterans Affairs, 30% of American military personnel in the Gulf War I theatre were injured enough by the experience to qualify for Federal disability benefits.

My father works for the California DVA as a Claims Representative, and confirms this - the rationale is exposure to chemical weapons and oil field pollution. The first war may have been "bloodless" on the "allied" side - but ten years down the line, it is looking a lot more deadly - a friend of mine, the head of a local Democratic Party outfit, told me last night that a

fellow member of his church lost her husband to melanoma a couple years back... he had been in the first Gulf War, career military, leading a troop of 8 Army Rangers. When the young woman's husband died, he was the 5th out of the 8 in that squad to pass on due to immune system disorders (cancer, etc.) ... the toll now stands at 8 of 8. The Pentagon tells her that this is just a terrible coincidence and has nothing to do with his Gulf War service.

221,000 American military personnel (no idea what the figure is for the Brits) would argue strongly against the first Gulf War being bloodless for our side... I wonder how many American military personnel are going to be in that same position, ten years from now?

Regards,
Thomas Leavitt

Patriotism and the War:
Two Weeks On
by Sean Gabb
(First Published as *Free Life Commentary*,
issue 97, 2nd April 2003)

Two weeks on, and this war is not going as planned. The plan was for a combination of heavy but precise bombing, to "shock and awe" the Iraqi people into quiescence, combined with a rapid march on Baghdad. Saddam Hussein would fall, and the Allies be welcomed into Baghdad as liberators. This has not happened. Instead, the Iraqis are fighting back, and the conquest has slowed while vast reinforcements can be brought out from America. According to Lieutenant General William Wallace, the most senior American ground commander in Iraq, "the enemy we're fighting is not the enemy we war-gamed against" So far as the capture of Baghdad is concerned, the choice may be now between various kinds of long and bloody siege. I hope the newspaper reports are wrong, and that the main fighting will soon be over. But if not, we appear to be committed to a bigger war than was promised.

Together with many other patriots, I was against going to war. We could see no evidence of an Iraqi threat to this country. No weapons of mass destruction had been found. More importantly, no means of delivery against the United Kingdom had been explained. Though repeatedly made, the

claims of a link with Islamic terrorism did not stand up to scrutiny. Nor did the misgovernment of Iraq by Saddam Hussein give any reason for us to interfere. Bearing in mind the proceedings - or their lack - in the United Nations, there was not even the usual excuse of upholding "international law". It was plain to anyone not drunk on the advertising claims of the armaments industry that the war would be longer than expected; and it was plain that any eventual victory would be attended by a legacy of hatred nearly as disastrous as actual defeat. There was talk of incidental benefits for us from going to war beside the Americans - but these were not shown to be otherwise unachievable, or worth the probable costs.

But while it was wrong to go to war, we are now at war; and the question to be asked is what we ought to do next. If we cannot call back and cancel what has been done this past fortnight, we can ask how to minimise its costs. It is necessary to keep ridiculing the cases for war given to us, and to keep tally of the lies and atrocities that have attended the Allied war effort. But it is also necessary to ask how we can most effectively - or least damagingly - get our country out of this American crusade.

My own view is that, now we are in it, we have no choice but to go through with this present stage of the war. It may now cost hundreds of British lives and thousands more of Iraqi lives. But I can see no reasonable alternative.

Let me explain this with another of my analogies. Imagine, my dear readers, that you are in a taxi. The driver charmed you into the back of it with his smile and unbounded promises of comfort. Sadly, he has not kept his promises. Soon into the journey began, he stopped the car and covered its scratched but still elegant paintwork with turquoise emulsion, which seems to have stopped the windscreen wipers from working. He then nearly crashed the car while moving, apparently at random, from lane to lane. He then ran over a couple of dogs and cats. At first, he denied hitting any animals at all, before conceding that he might accidentally have nearly hit some. His last word on the subject was that cats were disgusting creatures, and no one should feel sorry to have fewer of them in the world. He has not taken you where you asked him, and seems unable to understand your repeated insistence to be taken there or let out of the car.

Now he is on a dual carriageway with you, and has said he will take a sharp bend at speed. You think he is joking, but he begins to accelerate. At 80mph, you tell him to slow down. At 100mph, you threaten him. But he ignores you. He is driving at 150mph, and the bend is not more than three furlongs away. There is no time to brake. In under 20 seconds, you will be on the bend. There are three police cars following behind, and a helicopter overhead, but they can do nothing. Worse, the driver appears to have lost what little grasp he ever had on reality, and is chattering continually about how he is doing the right thing. It is not so much what he is saying that alarms, frightening though it is, as the tone in which he says it. You wonder if he has gone mad, or if some doctor has prescribed him an unhappy cocktail of medications.

All this being so, do you lean forward and try to wrestle control of the car? Or do you sit back and give the driver calming words of advice, while hoping that his driving skills in this supreme emergency may be better than he has so far revealed them to be, and that the car, despite its probable lack of maintenance, is up to taking the bend?

That, I suspect, is our current position. Though it was mad to get into it, we are now stuck in this war; and I cannot think what else to do but go through with it. If the accounts I have read are true, George Galloway, a Labour Member of Parliament, has called for a military defeat of the Allies. I do not want this. It would not bother me if the Americans alone were to be defeated. This is a war of unprovoked aggression against Iraq, and I respect the patriotic resistance of the Iraqi people - even in support of a vile *réégime*. But I do not want them to win. There are also British forces

involved. My country is in the wrong, but it is my country. National loyalty is not unconditional, and one can always think of circumstances to justify even active disloyalty. But invading Iraq, though wrong, is not one of those circumstances.

Or there is the call, made by the Duke of Devonshire in yesterday's *Daily Telegraph*, for an immediate Allied withdrawal. I do not think this would be advisable, even assuming the Americans could be persuaded to withdraw. The war is nowhere close to disastrous enough to justify the loss of face involved. Besides, if the enemies we have acquired hate us for the abuse of our strength, they will despise us no less for our perceived weakness should we now withdraw. Any end of the war that left any semblance of the present Iraqi Government in power would be seen as a defeat - a defeat not just for the United States, but also for this country. We should not be invading Iraq, but that does not necessarily mean we should run away leaving the job half done.

Or there is the suggestion, just made by my oldest friend, that we should withdraw British forces from the Persian Gulf, and leave the Americans to fight this war by themselves. Looking at our casualties, he says, one might think we were at war with the Americans; and, bearing in mind their present diplomatic skills, it should not be difficult to push them into the sort of argument that could justify breaking with them. They might even be secretly relieved to be without a partner that, while useful in the fighting and useful to support claims that this is not unilateral action, seems rather more squeamish than they are about putting on face masks and killing women and children.

Though attractive, however, I do not yet think this is a wise suggestion. The Americans probably do need us; and while it is one matter to back out of an alliance before the fighting starts, it is another to abandon allies on the field of battle. It would compromise our ability to make other alliances in the future. It would bring us into dangerous contempt throughout the Islamic world. And, while I despise the strategic thinking of the American Government, I have much respect for its power to seek revenge for such a betrayal.

And so we are left with continuing the war. I fear that all we can do is to urge it on to its fastest and most successful conclusion. That means tolerating the chance of high losses on all sides. It means people blown apart, dying with their insides ripped out, horribly maimed survivors, widows, orphans, and the silent, everlasting sadness thereafter. It also means the risk that success in this venture will encourage Messrs Bush and Blair into some other act of aggression.

Though I suppose I have joined their side, I remain endlessly sickened by the chorus of praise struck up over the past few months by the Conservative Party and the *Telegraph* set. This war, if for the moment unavoidable, is neither just nor wise. It is a wretched thing, and no good will ultimately come of it. And Tony Blair is not a great Prime Minister. Every British serviceman who dies in this war, every Iraqi serviceman and civilian whom we kill, every terrorist outrage at home this may provoke - these are his responsibility. We did not need to go to war with Iraq. It is thanks to him and his vanity or woeful misjudgement that we are at war. To return to the analogy, there may be no choice beforehand but to sit back and hope that the bend can be negotiated. But once the bend is negotiated and the car stopped, the choice is then between leaving the driver to the authorities and knocking his teeth out on the nearest kerb stone.

We must now hope that the rest of the Cabinet will work to contain our further involvement. We cannot get out of the fighting in which we are now involved. But we can limit our further liability. I look particularly to Gordon Brown to limit this through his budgets, just as Lord Kitchener starved the army of shells in the first years of the Great War. Once it is over, we must get our men out of the Persian Gulf as quickly as possible. If the Americans want to stay and take the blessings of democracy to wither in Iraq, or if they want to march on to Damascus or Teheran, they must be left to do so alone. Their coalition of the conscripted must be for one campaign only.

Above all, we must destroy Tony Blair. He has done this to us. He has forced us into a position where we can only choose between great evils. Speaking for myself, I have never in my life felt such impassioned loathing for a mere politician. He must be removed from any position of power or influence, and never again be able to send people to kill or be killed for such obscure reasons. His name must become a term of bitter abuse. If he is still Prime Minister six months after the fighting has ended, if he can dare show his face in public a day after leaving office, if his children have not within the next few years taken their mother's surname, his punishment will not have been just.

Patriotism and the War: Reply to Sean Gabb
Judith Hatton <Baklanova@aol.com>

It seems to me that you are trying to have it every which way. You are demanding that we back our forces in Iraq, while of course refusing to support the Americans, those unfortunates who, like us in the 19th century, are the targets of every other nation because of a bitter, sneaking feeling that they're better ...

At the same time you are faithfully repeating every last word of left-wing propaganda against the Americans. As I've said before, though you didn't publish my remarks, the world is full of those people whom Lenin ungratefully described as "useful idiots": his foreign supporters outside the Soviet Union. With the collapse of the latter, they were out of a job - "useless idiots"?

Since the one idea that they really took to in the days when they were useful - and some were very much so - was a violent hatred of America, and since people of this kind are always afraid (or unable) to change their minds, they were left with all this spare hatred. Now they can use it again. Do you realize how your views display how much you have been influenced by their unremitting propaganda?

I pay you the compliment of not thinking that you were ever consciously a useful idiot, but they are all around us, especially in the media. And if Libertarians have a fault, it is faith in the old Pelagius/Rousseau myth of the intrinsic, beautiful virtue of the human being ...

When you're my age ... but this myth is at the basis of much that is mischievous, including Socialism in all its forms. And it is very attractive, and stops us getting too depressed about the world around us, and, especially, about ourselves. But of course there must be an enemy who causes everything that might make us suspect, looking about us, that perhaps humanity isn't really as nice as all that. There must be an arch-Satan who is causing all the trouble, and America is the really convenient one - for one thing, it won't kill you for saying so.

A few facts: Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, and has used them on its neighbours and its own people. It has made war on two neighbours, Iran and Kuwait. For twelve years it has successfully defied the pathetic 1441. Iraqis who know Saddam personally say that he has never made any secret of his wish to set up a personal empire in the middle east, controlling all the area's oil supplies; also that he has never disguised his support for terrorism when it suits him.

He has killed one in seven of his own people, and driven one in six to exile. That may well be the reason why some are resisting so vigorously: those who might not are out of the country or dead, and the others know what'll happen to them if they don't.

As for the effects of direct American intervention in any country, isn't it worth remembering that the only two that had actual American rulers after the war: Germany and Japan; both became

democracies that were almost indecently prosperous, and were such successes that it's taken nearly fifty years for the aboriginal inhabitants to mess them up again?

What's the betting that you'll publish any of this? Ha!

Love to you both
Judith

Patriotism and the War: Reply to Sean Gabb
Sam Pope <spope@spope6.fsnet.co.uk>

Dear Sean,

It takes you a long time to get to the point, and to a student of military affairs, much of what you have said today is none too objective, however once you arrive at our revered leader, the PM, you are on firm ground.

If you hold political leaders in the same light as Trustees of the nation/state/populace etc. they do not rate very highly. Blair as the Chairman of Trustees of a major charity now would be in the dock, literally, without the option. Could you not progress this theme? Consider what is expected of trustees by law in this country, and extrapolate into his responsibilities within the constitutional scene. Attack his failure of function, rather than personality.

Just a thought.
Sam Pope

Patriotism and the War: Reply to Sean Gabb
Francis Woehrling <p4u66416@planetinternet.be>

Thank you for sending me your comments on the war - I could not believe that anybody could be so Nationalistic as you are: the world and the world system can go to hell, needs not to be reconstructed as long as little England survives (momentarily) in its daydreams - at least something you have in common with the youth in the streets - but they have the excuse of having lived in a decade of peace...

Now when we have to invest in the reconstruction - of course consumerism (moral and material) want *encore une minute Mr le Bourreau*

Francis Woehrling

Patriotism and the War: Reply to Sean Gabb
J. Neil Schulman <jneil@pulpless.com>

Sean,

You have got to be kidding.

It's two weeks into this war. Coalition forces have suffered around 50 casualties, the Iraqis have lost two divisions (Baghdad and Medina), and the remaining three will be gone within 72 hours. They

have about a dozen POWs of ours (maybe fewer since yesterday's rescue) and we have around 4,000 of theirs. The coalition has air supremacy over 100% of Iraq, controls Iraqi oil production and distribution, controls the main highway. Coalition forces surround all major Iraqi cities and are within 16 miles of the capital city of Baghdad. Iraqi command and control is sending messages by donkey.

Oh, yeah. Saddam Hussein and his two sons haven't been seen since we bombed their bunker two hours into the war.

Give me a single reason why I shouldn't consider this the most stunning military campaign since the Greeks took Troy by hiding soldiers in a wooden horse.

Neil

**Patriotism and the War: Reply to Sean Gabb
RDM**

Dear Sean

This is (I think) your second peroration against the liberation of Iraq that has ended with an anathema on Tony Blair. If his removal is of such urgent importance, presumably you accept its corollary that the only credible means of his removal - the Conservative Party - has to be supported unconditionally and to the ultimate in order to achieve that aim, notwithstanding its undoubted shortcomings?

Otherwise your condemnation of Blair will have equivalent vapidty to Mandatory UN Security Council Resolution 1441 as interpreted by yourself and France.

Now that Blair has (in your opinion) come out as the anti-Christ it would be interesting to know whether, with hindsight, you consider those who always regarded him as such, and supported the Conservative Party despite its widely-understood flaws, as having been more insightful than yourself?

On to Damascus!

**Patriotism and the War: Reply to Sean Gabb
Paul Rhodes <paul@prhodes.fsworld.co.uk>**

Dear Sean,

Just a little feedback on your conclusions *vis à vis* Iraq. Much of my life has been spent in the Mid East and Iraq was a major client.

Iraq is quite different to its neighbours (the GCC countries).It along with Israel and Iran are the regional "superpowers". It has the expertise to obtain and develop most technologies. In my case it was telecommunications systems. Working for the Mid East operation of a Canadian telecom company we supplied the comms network for Saddam's palaces and other sites. When the Iraqis took Kuwait they removed the systems we had installed at the KAF bases and moved them to Baghdad to use for spare parts !!

As we know it is usually not possible for our Politicians to be completely open and honest with us. Certainly Saddam has biological and chemical weapons and years of searching would have been unlikely to reveal them to the inspectors. Proverbial needle in a hay stack. Would he use them again ? would he co operate with terrorist groups, did he have wider ambitions to take (say) Saudi and the other Gulf states thereby holding the West to ransom over oil supplies ???

I must say that in talking to anti-war demonstrators none had any knowledge of Iraq or the region or the real issues. Many were simply anti-war or pro-Islam. Some of the fundamental issues cannot be understood unless there is a good understanding of the demands made by Islam (Koran, *Tawhid*). Any true believer cannot support a war waged by a Christian (Infidel) country against a Muslim country irrespective of the circumstances, the Koran does not allow this.

Of course trade and oil are strategic elements in this equation. Saudi alone is usually worth a net £5 billion to UK Ltd each year ignoring oil trades (that is buying in bulk and selling on to third parties) and invisibles.

Many GCC countries (also Iran) have publicly condemned the war but privately support it, they are happy to see the Saddam threat removed. I agree with your comments re the EU, UN and so on. With the expansion of the EU and Regional Assemblies everyone will eventually work for "the Government"!!!

Interesting times ahead. Must say though that having just returned from the northern tip of Vancouver Island where the conversations revolve around whales, bears, the weather and power outages etc etc trying to unravel the war equation gives me a headache, better go and lie down.

Regards,
Paul Rhodes

Patriotism and the War: Reply to Sean Gabb
Jan Narveson <jnarveso@watarts.uwaterloo.ca>

Hello, Sean,

I want to respond a bit to this commentary of yours on the war. I agree with you that the stated reasons for going to war did not justify it, although there was a bit of an about-face toward the end, the new reason being that the Saddam regime is truly awful - which is surely true, though as you say it is not clear that it justifies external states making war against it (not obviously, at the least). But all that said, your analogy is drastically overstated and importantly so. I have been following the war on TV rather more than I would have normally thought I'd do, and my judgment is that what all the critics have been saying is plainly very much exaggerated. As a matter of fact, the war is going reasonably well, and I believe that the public has been misled by pundits who have probably been quoted out of context. I distinctly remember Mr. Bush saying, explicitly, that the army would be there as long as necessary and that he did not expect it to be really swift. (One critic claims to quote him that the war would be a "mere march" - something he could not have meant if he said it, and which I very much doubt that he did say, just like that. What I have heard from the president is only that the Americans would do what it took to depose this regime, and that it would not be a really quick *go à la* Gulf.) Moreover, the public has been much misled by the example of the Gulf war, a very different item from this one, as all present military commanders were well aware. War on the open desert is something that American technology is eminently fitted to deal with in very short order, and it did. This war is in populated territory, with a population very

effectively terrorized into submission for a quarter of a century. Those who planned it were aware of the fact.

As of this morning, the Americans have secured the Baghdad airport, clearly a major objective by any criteria. They are closing in on the capital from three sides and are right at the outskirts from one of them. Their pauses at places like Basra, as you know, are due almost entirely to the humanitarian scruples of these forces. It is apparently true, as argued by Mr. Seymour Hirsch in recent issues of the New Yorker, that Mr. Rumsfeld bludgeoned his generals into going in with a much smaller force than they would have liked, and it is possible that that is slowing things down a bit. But then, when you consider how fast they have in fact gone, and consider also that the slowdowns have been out of concerns about the effects of house-to-house fighting on local populations - something that a larger army wouldn't, likely, affect all that much - then the fact that they have also done it much more economically than the generals would have liked is not obviously all that bad. In any case, this army is doing very well indeed. Its casualty levels, as before, are in the order of 1 of ours to about 200 or so of theirs, and a good many of them have been due to "friendly fire" rather than to the efforts of the enemy as such. Of course we must deplore the need for extensive casualties among the enemy, but then, this is a war, and if the enemy doesn't like this they are welcome to surrender.

Additionally, it has to be pointed out that this war is just about unique in history for the extreme attention paid to the matter of civilian damages. Of course there has been some, but you did not sufficiently point out in your letter that the damages there have been largely, though not entirely, been due to the nature of Hussain's regime and its tactics. It is a regime which obviously has no respect whatever for the lives and well-beings of its members, all of which are regarded strictly as means to the infinite enhancements of its leader's ego. We may dispute whether the war was justified, but we cannot dispute that this regime deserves violent removal.

Predictions are never entirely safe, of course, but it is crystal clear that your analogy with the taxi driver driving recklessly along is completely unjust. This war is being fought probably more expertly than any war in history to date - given the unbelievably vast means of destruction at the disposal of the allied army, their care and circumspection in using them are laudable, as is the amount of attention they have devoted to seeing to the needs of the populace wherever they are in control. The Iraqi people in many places are already responding pretty positively, and if the current track record is sustained, as we have no reason to doubt, then I don't see much reason to doubt that it will pretty generally come around to supporting the outcome and the means which have been proven unhappily necessary to bringing it about.

Mr. Blair has committed himself to the goal of an all-Iraqi but democratic regime being in power in a suitably short time after the military battle is sufficiently concluded. I don't know whether that is entirely feasible - especially if, as the Americans are saying, the ultimate disposition of the Iraqi's governmental system is to be supervised by the U.N. (whom you and I distrust in quite enormous measure). But it seems to me that we have no reason whatever to think, as so many irresponsible critics seem to be implying, that this war is being fought to add to a supposed American empire.

We should, then, credit the Americans and also your own government with putting forth a reasonably clear and sincere account of this war, its conduct, and its current aims. The color in question may not be pure white, but it is much closer to that than pure black. I do think you should rethink and in some measure restate what you have said below.

Regards,
Jan Narveson

Patriotism and the War: Reply to Sean Gabb
Randal <cousins@easynet.co.uk>

I have the utmost respect for Sean Gabb, whose political views are in many respects apparently indistinguishable from my own. On this one, however, I have to differ.

Dr Gabb argues that, while condemning this sorry invasion of Iraq and the leaders responsible for it, nevertheless as an English patriot he feels compelled to hope for a quick victory by the US/UK forces on pragmatic grounds.

He makes good points in support of his position - the risk of retaliation from America if we abandon them on the battlefield, and the danger of loss of respect (in the sense the term is used by mafiosi, and American grand strategists today) in the Arab and Muslim world.

Nevertheless, I do not agree with him. I agree with others who have said the best course of action would be for Britain to announce our intention to cease fire and to withdraw our troops from Iraq forthwith (giving the US a set period of time to replace them in the field, out of consideration for past alliance).

At the same time, it goes without saying that all those in government who supported the invasion should be forced to resign and the new government should put out a formal statement confirming that the attack was illegal, that Britain should not have been involved in the first place, and that Britain will fight to defend its interests when threatened, not get involved in aggressive adventures, and will pay reparations to Iraq in due course.

The main reason for my disagreement is that I believe Dr Gabb underestimates, in this case, the importance of precedent and the effect of perceived success in politics.

Dr Gabb wants to see the invasion of Iraq successfully concluded, as quickly as possible and with the least short term damage, and then to get on with ousting those responsible and seeing that it doesn't happen again. Well, sadly I don't believe the world works that way. Given anything other than a clear and obvious defeat, the government and Labour PR machine will spin the issue into one which, at best, is muddy and unclear, so that most people will ignore it as a determinant of whom to support, politically. At worst, with doubtless plenty of propaganda film of cheering Iraqis and finds of illegal weapons, torture chambers, and mass graves, if not "WMD" sites, they will be able to spin it into a perceived victory in the minds of many.

That is what was done over Kosovo, where NATO intervention was a humanitarian catastrophe, changing a low level ongoing terrorist secessionist movement into a wholesale ethnic cleansing of non-Albanians from most of Kosovo and spreading terrorism to neighbouring Macedonia. Nevertheless, the popular perception of the Kosovo intervention was as a "success", and it is now a deeply damaging precedent for international law and national sovereignty. Given any kind of "success" in Iraq, the costs will be largely discounted and overlooked in just the same way, the emphasis in the popular mind will be on all sorts of fantastic and lurid scenarios for what might have happened if the invasion had not been undertaken, and Iraq will serve as another precedent for the next aggression.

Because of this, I believe it is of the utmost importance that the Iraq aggression should be a perceived failure for the governments that embarked upon it.

What of Dr Gabb's two pragmatic arguments against a British withdrawal, to which I referred above?

As far as loss of "respect" in the Arab/Muslim world is concerned, well we have now put ourselves needlessly on the side of the American neoconservative cabal in their crusade against the Arabs and Islam. We should not be on either side in that fight, and making this clear is more important than "respect" in deterring attacks. We have more than sufficient strength to deal with attacks on our interests should they occur, if we weren't committing our forces to unnecessary overseas adventures.

The threat of US retaliation against our perceived betrayal is real, at least until the American people deal forcefully with the arrogant fanatics who have hijacked their government. However, in the present circumstances we would merely be joining a long list of countries that America has decided deserve "punishment" for not siding with them in their all-out assault on international law and national sovereignty. We would find allies and support, and in the long run the only way to deal with a threat such as America currently poses to the world is to stand against it. Unless the weaker nations stand against the bully nation, they will be picked off individually. Ironically, in view of the widespread misuse of the term as part of the demonisation campaign against Iraq, this is a case of appeasement. To side with the Americans now out of fear of their anger if we do not, and in the hope that we can live with the problems of the success of this particular aggression, is appeasement of American aggression. I do not believe in appeasement of aggressor nations, however powerful, unless certain destruction were to be the only and inevitable alternative.

When all is said and done, however, all we are discussing is a theoretical preference. In the short run, barring a miracle involving substantial outside support or some sort of catastrophe elsewhere, the forces of the United States were always going to promptly overwhelm the forces of Iraq, and short of guerilla resistance to foreign occupation, there was never any doubt that the overwhelming firepower of the US would prevail. The fact that the Iraqi military put up any resistance at all was a testimony to their heroism and discipline. To appreciate the disparity in strengths, it is necessary to understand that the gulf between the capabilities of the US/UK alliance and Iraq is probably much greater than that between Hitler's Germany and Belgium or the Netherlands in 1940. The US/UK will obviously easily win the war, but whether any gains will outweigh the catastrophic losses in terms of the damage to international relations, the devastating blow to the rule of international law, and the costs of the future occupation and regional disruption, remains to be seen.

Regardless, the best outcome of this war, for Britain and for the world, and even in the long run for the American people, would be a humiliating climbdown for the UK regime now, and either a similar climbdown or a disastrous military defeat for the US regime, before they have the chance to build ever greater disasters on the back of "success" in this venture. That it is as unrealistic to expect such an outcome as to expect Hitler to pull back from Holland after his invasion had started in 1940, or the Dutch armed forces to defeat the Wehrmacht, merely reflects the fact that what is right cannot be expected always to happen, in this vale of tears.

In reality, there is probably as little hope that Blair and the other guilty men will be brought down by Dr Gabb's preferred scenario as for my own idealistic dream to materialise. The fact is that, barring a miracle, evil has triumphed once again. We can only hope for the highest possible price to be levied on those responsible, in order to help in the fight to resist the next proposed invasion.

The Pride of Mr. George W. Bush
Stephen Howd <Howd@btopenworld.com>

So it's war, with the British army, Royal Navy, and RAF tagging along with the might of the US war machine. How have we come to be involved in a war which does not have broad support either amongst the British public or in Parliament and which is, in the view of most international lawyers, in clear breach of our obligations under international law?

It seems to me that the Bush administration has been determined to go to war with Iraq, come what may, ever since the atrocities of September 11th 2001. It is plain enough that the "Hawks" in the Bush administration - Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfecicz in particular - have long wanted to complete the "unfinished business" of the last Gulf War. The events of September 11th 2001 gave them the opportunity to achieve this ambition. America was, understandably, shocked and horrified by the destruction of the world trade centre and the other terrorist atrocities which took place on that terrible day. There may have been an element of genuine concern that Iraq might pass weapons of mass destruction to terrorists although this has not, until the present crisis, been at all likely. However the main motive seems to be pure and simple revenge under the doctrine of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", combined with a desire to "shock and awe" the rest of the world with a demonstration of the might of the US war machine. A collateral benefit would be the fall in oil prices which would follow the replacement of the repellent Baathist regime with one with which the rest of the world could trade freely.

Of course Iraq had nothing whatever to do with the atrocities of September 11th but it would seem that the Bush administration has managed to engineer a perception amongst the American public that there is some kind of link. In Britain the Blair government's attempts to link Iraq with Osama Bin Laden have collapsed in farce but regrettably the American media seem to be less willing to probe the unfounded assertions of the US administration for fear of being seen as unpatriotic.

Why then did the Bush administration pursue the UN route? I think that the explanation is straightforward. The "Doves" in the US administration - Colin Powell in particular - pointed out to the "Hawks" that an attack on Iraq without any form of UN blessing would be perceived by the rest of the world as a naked act of aggression. Blair would have been unable to back the US in such a war and it would have been even more difficult to secure the tacit support of the countries bordering Iraq which are the necessary launch pads for an invasion.

The Bush administration, with Blair's support, therefore embarked upon a wholly cynical and insincere exercise to obtain a UN Security Council resolution authorising war. Resolution 1441 was sufficiently tightly drafted that it was expected that Iraq would find full compliance impossible and that Saddam Hussein would in any event defy it, as he has defied previous resolutions. However the Iraqi dictator was too smart to fall for this one. Iraq has substantially complied with Resolution 1441 as Dr. Blix made clear on the Radio 4 Today programme this morning. The inspectors have been given uninhibited access to all locations in Iraq, including those identified to them as suspect by Western intelligence agencies. They have found nothing of any significance - no chemical agents, no biological agents, and no evidence of a nuclear weapons programme. All that has been found is a few empty shells, some pilotless drones, and missiles which might have a range marginally in excess of the 150 miles permitted by the UN. Iraq has reluctantly agreed to destroy these and has in fact destroyed no less 70 of them before the US and Britain decided to close down the inspections and go to war. Maybe Iraq does still have some chemical and/or biological weapons. Our troops will no doubt find out over the next few days, as may the civilian populations of Kuwait and Israel. Maybe it does not. Whether it does or not, the fact is that no such weapons have been found by the UN inspectors in 3 and a half months. It is hard to believe that they have been retained in significant quantities.

In those circumstances it is hardly surprising that the UN Security Council was not willing to authorise a war against Iraq. It defies common sense to go to war when Iraq is co-operating with the

UN weapons inspectors, if the object of the war is to enforce Security Council resolutions requiring disarmament, as it ostensibly is. All this talk about France and its "unreasonable" veto is simply another smokescreen to try and get public support for a war. France was by no means alone in its outright opposition to the war. Russia, China, Germany and Syria (which supported and participated in the last Gulf War) were and are also firmly against. The non-aligned six were also against or at least deeply uneasy. The second resolution was not withdrawn because France would have vetoed it; it was withdrawn because it would not have commanded majority support in the Security Council.

So we end up where we started. The Bush administration's diplomatic ploy has ended in outright failure and America, with British support, is engaged in an unlawful act of naked aggression against a sovereign state.

All of this has caused me fundamentally to reconsider my lifelong support for the Anglo-American alliance and "special relationship". This has always been one sided (Suez, the Falklands, Grenada etc. etc.) but during the Cold War it was absolutely necessary for Britain's security. Since the Cold War I have continued to support the special relationship because I have seen it as a useful counter-balance to the threat posed to our national independence by the European Union. However the present crisis has led me very reluctantly to the conclusion that it should now end.

The fact is that Britain is shackled by its right arm to the USA and by its left arm to the EU. Neither of these shackles is any longer in our national interest. We should break free of both and pursue our own foreign policy in our own national interest. That will often mean co-operating diplomatically and even militarily with the US and/or with the EU but such support should no longer be automatic. Under the Bush administration the USA is rapidly becoming the biggest and most powerful rogue state in history. We should have no part of that.

I hope and pray that the military adventure which is now underway will be concluded with a minimum of casualties to our own troops and to the civilians and conscripts of Iraq. It is sad that if this is so then Blair and Bush will be able to claim the "credit" for their stance and will probably engage on further military adventurism against the rest of the "axis of evil".

**Why Tony Blair Must be Destroyed:
A Conservative Case
Sean Gabb
(First Published as *Free Life Commentary*,
issue 98, 7th April 2003**

The Friday before this war started, I had dinner with some friends, where I was forced to defend my bitter dislike of Tony Blair. At the moment, nothing could be easier. The front page of my newspaper today carries one of the most disgusting photographs I have ever seen. It is of Ali Ismael Abbas, a 12 year old boy in Baghdad who had his arms blown off in a rocket attack at the weekend. His lower body appears to have been burned all over, and the smile on his face is probably the effect of the opiate he was given to block the pain. The rocket that did this may have been fired by the Americans - or even, though I doubt if they now have the means, by the Iraqis. But thanks to Mr Blair, we share in the corporate responsibility. Because of his joining us in the "coalition of the willing", it is partly in our name that this boy has had his life destroyed. Killing and maiming are always bad. I doubt at present if they can ever be right. Certainly, unless absolutely necessary, they are wrong. For me, that is reason enough for the most envenomed hatred.

However, the question was asked of me before the war started, when my opinion of Mr Blair was already fixed. This beastly war aside, what do I so dislike about him?

I will begin by conceding that my usual complaints about his domestic policies do not in themselves justify such positive loathing. Yes, he has integrated this country further into the European Union since he came to power. Yes, his other domestic policies have been directed to the creation of a sinister police state. He has done all this and is to be blamed for it. Even so, is there anyone to replace him who would not have done, or would not continue to do, very much the same?

Forget their claims, unconvincing as they are. The Conservatives are just as committed in reality to the European project. They got us into it, and have said nothing to indicate they would get us out. If possible, they are even more committed to the American alliance than Labour. Indeed, I suspect they would have us pressing on with the Americans to Damascus and Teheran, whereas many of the present Ministers seem to want this horror over for us as quickly as the soldiers can be marched out of Basra.

As for all the police state laws, these the Conservatives have failed efficiently to oppose during the past six years, or have even supported. Nor let it be forgotten that it was the Conservatives who began to demolish the Constitution when they were last in power. Can we hope for any better from them? I rather think not.

How, then, about the most likely Labour replacements of Mr Blair - Gordon Brown and David Blunkett? Would they be any better? Again, not. Mr Blunkett is hard at work outdoing both Michael Howard and Jack Straw in the attack on due process. Mr Brown might be slightly less friendly to European integration, but this cannot be taken for granted; and he seems to lack Mr Blair's belief in the marketising of public services, which is about his only worthwhile achievement.

So why hate the man? What is there to justify wanting him replaced by people who might only differ for the worst, if they differed at all?

The answer is that Mr Blair is so bad because he is so effective in the work of destruction. Let us compare England with America. The United States has a written constitution. Plainly, this has not preserved American freedom so well as its framers hoped. But at least it draws a visible boundary between what is constitutional and what is not. Everyone can see when a law crosses that boundary; and its clear wording provides a point around which libertarians and conservatives can rally - and can sometimes rally with success. Our own constitution is different. Though it has restrained power for longer than any other, it is not written. We have fundamental laws, but they are not easily perceived, and their breach is hardly ever obvious to those without a detailed legal and historical understanding.

We are free in this country because freedom is part of our constitution as conceived in the wider, old-fashioned sense of the word. It resides in our habits of thought and action. Now, this sort of constitution derives its stability not from the wording of a written document, but from a mass of conservative prejudice. Freedom is generally an administrative inconvenience. It stands in the way of privilege for wealthy business interests. The lack of detailed policing that it requires gives offence to the various moral entrepreneurs who make their way into politics and the media. Considered alone, trial by jury is an expensive and often inaccurate means of deciding guilt. Freedom of the press allows people to say hateful things. Unlike any specific disadvantages, their benefits are hardly ever understood by the mass of people. What keeps them, and all the other freedoms and protections of freedom, reasonably safe is that they are parts of an ancient and general order of things. They are legitimised in the main less by their rightness than by the appearance that they have always existed in this country.

There can be no doubt of the many benefits that have flowed over the centuries from our Constitution. Those Americans who dismiss it as a fraud should bear in mind that their own is barely a quarter as old, and that it is already falling apart. Even so, it is peculiarly open to attack at the margins. The restraints in power in this country are largely customary. They derive their force from the fact that they exist within a web of associations that tie the present to the past. Let these associations be removed, and with them will go the old restraints on power.

That is, for example, why compulsory metrication is so objectionable. Metres are more rational than yards, and probably more useful for most purposes. Compulsion aside, it is the break with the past that is objectionable - especially when the benefits, though undeniable, are not that great. It is the same with renaming writs as claim forms and bailiffs as enforcement agents, with changing the old forms of public address, with rearranging museum displays to make the English past shameful or incomprehensible, and with much more. Individually, these changes may be of no importance. It is their conjunction that is important. Let there be a sufficient conjunction of changes, and the setting within which freedom resides is destroyed. Disconnected from the web of associations in which they have come down to us, valuable protections like trial by jury and *habeas corpus* can be presented as more rubbish from the past to be cleared away - especially when they can be presented as hindrances to a cheaper and more efficient system of criminal justice. Unlike in America, where the Constitution must first be abolished or plainly turned on its head, we can be led into tyranny along a route where every step can be presented as of no great consequence, and where objectors can be dismissed as pedants or cranks. As Lord Eldon said against the claims for parliamentary reform - and, I am now inclined to think, rightly - "Touch one atom, and the whole is lost".

What makes Mr Blair so dangerous is that he has been able, as no other politician could, to combine systematic destruction of the old order of things with reasonable economic policies in the short term, and to persuade large numbers of people for most of the time that his is not a very radical government. It is a radical government at the cultural level, but his genius has been to conceal this. I had lunch last month with a highly intelligent friend from my university days who announced as if it were an incontestable truth that "Tony Blair is the best Tory Prime Minister this country has ever had". Not so. He is the least Tory. His most honest statement of intent was his speech to the 1999 Labour Conference, in which he attacked "the forces of conservatism". It was so honest that it was soon removed from the Labour Party website. One of my friends at dinner the other week tried to claim that this was really an attack on resistance to change within the public sector. But he is wrong. I looked out the [speech](#) on *The Guardian* website. It is a manifesto for destroying every ancient association, so that any conservative defence of freedom - and this is the best one we have, I repeat - becomes impossible. The New Labour project has little to do with overturning the economic settlement imposed by Margaret Thatcher. It is, much rather, a cultural revolution. But his charm - his ability to make radicalism look other than it is - has cast almost a magic spell over much of the English middle class.

That is why I so long for his destruction. No one else in politics would be so able to do what he has done. Take him away, and the spell would be at least weakened. The problem of who should replace him is not, on this analysis, a problem. Anyone will do. Gordon Brown might be more socialist in his economic policies - but he would not so easily seduce the middle class formers of opinion. Iain Duncan Smith might be even less friendly to our remaining civil liberties. Anyone else might be worse in some other respect. But there is no one else in British politics with the same lethal blend of qualities to hide the work of destruction, or to make it seem an improvement on the past.

Of course, the war may have changed this. It has wiped that boyish smile from Mr Blair's face. He has aged ten years in the past six months, and the result is not pretty. From now on, his every appearance in public will be attended by passionate demonstrations. Combine this with the

unconcealable effects of his economic policies, and he may have lost his hold over the national mind. Until last year, perhaps, he could be compared to the Lloyd George of 1910 - the man of the people standing up to the forces of conservatism. He may now be compared to the Lloyd George of 1922 - the dangerous adventurer surrounding himself with all that is corrupt and all that blocks the way back to a gentler and safer and greatly more attractive past. Nothing may ever be easy for him again. Never again may his good intentions be so readily trusted. Perhaps, therefore, we have him where we want him - as the weak leader of a weak government, able to do little more than sit back while we wait for the Conservatives or some other party of replacement to pull itself together.

On the other hand, this is not certain. A Prime Minister in being is still a Prime Minister; and events may always bring a recovery of his standing and power. And though I am not often given to explosions of moral outrage, that photograph will not quickly fade from my memory. I cannot think of it, and of our vicarious role in its production, without wanting to shout obscenities. Let him be replaced, I say, and soon. It matters not who replaces him. His continued residence in Downing Street dirties this country. He is trash, and all I really want at this moment is to know that I shall live long enough to dance on his grave.

Why Tony Blair Must be Destroyed: Reply to Sean Gabb
Sean Fear <fear_sean@hotmail.com>

While I would disagree with you over the Iraq issue, I think that overall that is a very good analysis of what Tony Blair stands for. He is not particularly radical in economic terms (although the economy is plainly starting to suffer from tax rises and red tape), but you are right that he hates, or at least despises, anything that is traditional, and distinctively British, and longs to replace it with something that is, in his eyes, more rational. That would place him at odds with almost every British Prime Minister of the twentieth century apart from Ted Heath.

Heath's willingness to take us into the EU, his abolition of the traditional counties, his breaking of the traditional link between Conservatives and Unionists, were all the acts of a man who cared nothing for tradition. Blair can really be regarded as a more charming and effective (and thus more dangerous) version of Ted Heath.

There is one ray of hope though. Labour activists have effectively gone on strike in the coming local elections. Labour are fighting 1,200 fewer seats than in 1999, when the same seats last came up for election. As a result, hundreds of Conservative councillors will be returned unopposed. Some councils have actually now been won by the Conservatives because so few Labour opponents have stood against them.

If this process continues, then Blair may, as you say, find himself in the same position as Lloyd George in 1922, rejected by both his opponents and his supporters. He may think that does not matter if he can appeal to the voters over the heads of party members, but the fate of Lloyd George suggests that that will not work.

Why Tony Blair Must be Destroyed: Reply to Sean Gabb
Toadflax <toadflax@onetel.net.uk>

Most interesting article,

However I am afraid that the constitution of Britain was fatally wounded nearly a century ago by the Parliament Act of 1911 and further still by the allowing of life peers in the 1950's

Essentially prior to 1911 there was a group of about 600 people, chosen to all intents and purposes randomly who did not need to seek election and were by and large financially totally independent.

They were generally 'land' based which gave them a clear insight into the rhythm, patience, beauty and horrors of the natural law which we humans as animals are part of - something which the metropolitan elites in their concrete jungle forget all too easily.

They did not depend on others for election or finance, and were just about as independent as you could get

It cannot be forgotten that by and large they were practising Christians; to view this life as only the beginning - not the be all and end of all - is essential in order to prevent life's inevitable disasters and misfortunes clouding your judgment

They were a living constitution and were the Guardians of British freedom as they had an absolute veto on all legislation. They were in effect the Jury of Parliament. Equally importantly, their only absolute power was to block legislation - they had no power to create legislation themselves without the agreement of commoners - a vital restraint on corruption and despotism.

Only a living constitution - a truly independent senate beholden to nobody - can be in any way better than a written constitution which is weakened progressively by time, as it is trapped in a moment of time and cannot therefore adapt to future technologies, communications and novel evils.

I am of course talking of the House of Lords

The Parliament Act of 1911 is what will go down in history as the beginning of the inevitable slide to a police state because it tore up the oldest constitution in the world and gave those with neither the independence of election or finance absolute power.

As you state the 'conservative' with a small 'c' institutions of the UK have acted as a brake since 1911, albeit withering slowly over the years, however Blair marks the point where the whole process is now visibly unravelling. It is most prescient that you compare Blair to Lloyd George, for Blair is completing what Lloyd George started.

The War: Won but not Over
by Sean Gabb
(First Published as *Free Life Commentary*,
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Though the pacification is as yet incomplete, Baghdad has fallen and the war seems in the conventional sense to be over. I am glad that the Allies have won, and that they have won so quickly. I did not think they would. I really did expect the Iraqis to use their advantages of defence to greater effect. I expected them to blow up all the bridges over the Tigris and Euphrates, and to spread rubble over all the roads into Baghdad - thereby preventing the Allies from driving straight in - and to use snipers to hold up attempts at clearing the rubble. Above all, I expected the Iraqis to defend the city from behind a large and shifting mass of civilians. I do not know why they failed to do any of this, deciding instead on strategies that an idiot child - let alone the Americans - might have countered. As said, I am glad that they failed. But it has made me wrong so far in my gloomy predictions. I was wrong and my more bellicose friends and opponents were right.

This being said, it does not affect my belief that the war was unnecessary and therefore should not have been fought by this country. Success does justify many risks - and this was a risk. But no degree of success can justify a risk that was unnecessary, that has brought human, financial and diplomatic costs, and where the longer term consequences of success may involve still greater costs. Such was this war.

I know that I am repeating myself. Then again, repetition is a valid form of argument where new or forgotten propositions are concerned. But I regard the proper duty of the British Government to be the protection of British life and property. The duty may occasionally require interventions abroad, but will mostly require action only within the borders of the United Kingdom. I believe this for two reasons.

First, a government is an agent of its people, not a principal, and so must take care to spend lives and money on ventures that relate directly to its duty.

Second, when governments set their foreign policies according to known and predictable interests, the chances of war are much reduced. Even when wars do happen, they are for obvious and limited ends, and do not require people to be lied into states of hysteria that are far easier to excite than to abate and that may complicate efforts to make peace.

Against this proposition, three arguments have been raised. Once again, I know that I have disputed these on many occasions. But I have not so far been successful in winning my case. I will therefore risk the impatience of my readers in repeating myself here as well.

First, we were told that Iraq had weapons that it was willing and able to use against this country, or that it was willing to give to others for use against us. Day after day, the media poured out claims to chill the blood. To these were added claims from within my own circle. One person told me - he promised me he had inside knowledge - that there were tunnels under the presidential palaces in Baghdad up to a mile long, filled with chemical and biological weapons. Someone else assured me that there was a secret nuclear programme, but that Tony Blair was unable to reveal its details to us. Someone else told me in a semi-closed meeting about the "verified links" between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. Iraq was cried up endlessly as a clear and present danger.

If true, this would have justified war on the principles given above. But I doubted if it was true. Iraq is a poor and barbarous country. It lost a war with the more civilised countries in 1991, and after that was continually monitored and blockaded. That it could, even so, develop weapons for use against us struck me as absurd - and that was without considering the evidence. But just look at the evidence given. Assertions and plain forgeries aside, not even an opportunistic connection was shown between al Qaeda and the Government of Iraq.

As for the alleged threat posed by the Government of Iraq in its own right, we can now see the quality of that evidence. Doubt has been justified by events. If I was wrong in my military predictions, it was only so far as I believed the Iraqis to be more effective than they were. Their inability to defend their own country showed the nature of their threat to ours. They used throughout nothing better than old conventional weapons. Many of these they had trouble making to work. If Saddam Hussein had been the lunatic he was claimed to be, he ought surely to have used his chemical and biological weapons on the first day of the war. If he was the scheming tyrant he was also claimed to be, he ought surely to have used them on the last. He did not use them because he did not have them.

Until Saturday, I was willing to believe that such weapons would be "found" by the Americans. They had the means, motive and opportunity for planting them. But the surrender of Amir Humudi

al-Sadi has complicated any such plan. He was the chief weapons adviser to the Iraqi Government. Before the war, he had repeatedly denied that his country had any of the weapons it was alleged to have. He helped reveal the report on Iraqi weapons published by the British Government as a mass of lies - and often of plagiarised and obsolete lies. For his own safety, it was in his interest, once the war was over, to confess that he had been lying, and to validate all American claims. In fact, he called a news conference before surrendering and repeated his earlier denials: "I was knowledgeable about these programmes" he said. "I never told anything but the truth and time will bear me out". Bearing in mind how little shame the present Government of America has about torturing prisoners of war, it will be interesting to see how long Mr al-Sudi maintains this insistence. But no amount of retraction will now be believed. There were no "weapons of mass destruction". There was no danger to this country. We were lied into this war.

And so this first claim has been dropped for the moment. The war is now justified on the second grounds of "*régime* change". Some of my friends have always supported the war on these grounds, and, while I do not agree with them, I do not accuse them of discreditable motives. But I am shocked by the sudden change of excuse in Washington and London. Interference in Iraqi internal affairs was expressly and continually disclaimed before the war started. The talk then was all about disarmament of Mr Hussein. He had only to comply with the weapons inspectors, we were assured, and his country would then be left alone. To see the politicians now changing their story reminds me of the Victory Square parade in George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*.

But let us set aside the manner of its advancement, and consider instead the substance of the claim - that we have a right or obligation to overthrow tyranny throughout the world. Of course, I deny the claim. So long as it does not endanger us, I do not see what happens in other countries as any business of ours. I know there has always been a strain of liberal imperialism in the libertarian movement. But this is misguided. It is no more the business of our government to liberate foreigners from oppression than it is to feed them if they are hungry. If we oppose foreign aid, why support humanitarian invasions? They both involve spending the taxpayers' money. Why the inconsistency?

I suppose the alleged answer is that foreign aid does not work, but that liberation does. But what reason have we to suppose that it does work? If the Americans were to conquer Iraq and its neighbours, as we conquered India, it might work. We had not only the will to put down widow burning and sacrificial murder, but the means to enforce our will. We stayed there long enough to remake Indian civilisation. Will the Americans now rule Iraq for two centuries? I think not. The intention seems to be to set up a new government there and then withdraw.

Now, liberal democracy requires more than a written constitution and a few bribes. Though all human beings may want to be free, I doubt if all have an equal capacity for freedom. Free institutions are not the same as satellite television dishes and motor cars. They cannot be exported to and established in countries that have not previously had them. Instead, they proceed from the cultural values of a nation. They can be gradually transplanted. They can even spontaneously evolve. But they cannot be unpacked as if from a box.

Unless they can be taken apart and remade, the various civilisations of the Arab world all require strong authoritarian government. The looting and communal violence we have seen in Iraq since the collapse of its government may be in part a reaction against tyranny. But it is also what happens when order is destroyed in a deeply corrupt society. It will be ended when order is restored, but this order will not be liberal or democratic. To set up a constituent assembly that is any more than a fraud will mean reproducing indoors the hatred now running wild in the streets. This is a truth that liberal imperialists need to learn in every generation. Because of this war, we are now due for another lesson in true sociology.

There is worse. By conquering Iraq, we may have destabilised the country and the entire region. The Arab mind of the past hundred years has been divided between secular nationalism and radical Islam. The first of these now looks to have been comprehensively defeated. The resulting void will not, I think, be filled by liberal democracy. Instead, millions of young men can be expected to grow their beards and pay attention to the usual texts. They will probably make everyone around them unhappy. And I am reasonably sure they will contrive to make us unhappy before the fiends who direct foreign policy in Washington move on from preventive war to preventive genocide.

But I turn to the third justification for a specifically British involvement in the war. This takes it as given that the Americans wanted to invade Iraq, and does not ask why. It simply looks at the advantages for Britain of supporting the Americans. The main advantage alleged is that the war may have destroyed all chance of our integration into Europe. There are persistent claims that Tony Blair will use his restored popularity to call a sudden referendum on the Euro. More likely, though, it seems that the French and Germans have just had all their suspicions confirmed that Britain will never be a loyal and contented member of the European Union, and that our leaving it could be more a question of when than whether.

Before the fighting started, I might have been willing to accept this Machiavellian justification of war. Getting out of the European Union, after all, is a first rate British interest. But, having looked at the civilian casualties - small in number as they have so far been - I have changed my mind. I cannot stop thinking about that poor child who last week had his arms blown off and his lower body scorched all over. If the war had been for our immediate defence, I have no doubt I should have hardened my heart and agreed that his suffering was regrettable but necessary. But the war was not for immediate defence. It was at best in pursuit of an interest that involves further contingencies before it can be achieved. His life has been destroyed for nothing. Perhaps worse, it may have been destroyed because we as a nation are too decadent to save ourselves by other means from a wholly political threat. If we cannot use our still formidable constitutional freedoms to save ourselves without that, I do not believe we deserve to be saved. There is a story that Pope Innocent VIII was prescribed human blood to keep him alive. Three boys were chosen and bled. Too much was taken and the boys died. The Pope still died. Perhaps that is now what we have become.

Since that picture of Ali Ismaeel Abbas was published, some of my critics have stopped denouncing me for my cold-hearted nationalism. I am now accused of being soft-hearted - almost a "leftie". The reason for this is that I have not made myself sufficiently clear. I deny that it is our duty to go out of our way to help foreigners when they are suffering. But I also deny that it is our right to make them suffer when it serves some doubtful interest of our own. What was done to that boy would always have appalled me. But the knowledge that I share in the corporate responsibility for it almost maddens me with shame and horror.

I hear the liberal imperialist argument that he has been destroyed so that others in Iraq might live in peace and freedom. As said, I doubt if they will live in peace and freedom. I am also not concerned. I am suspicious of caring about people whose faces are invisible. I prefer to look at individuals. Perhaps this leads to an imperfect view of suffering. On the other hand, it keeps one from the callous indifference to actual, known lives that has been shown over again these past few centuries by men who killed even as they paraded their universal but abstract love of humanity.

I am told that the American Government has a list of future targets, and that on it are Syria, Iran, Cuba and North Korea. Already, it seems, opinion is being softened for war with Syria - it has, we are told, "weapons of mass destruction". I do not know whether to laugh or cry. How could these psychopathic children have been elected in London and Washington?

I do not yet know how Mr Blair will emerge from this war. My fear is that he will be strengthened in his ability to do evil at home as well as abroad. But perhaps the people of Britain have not joined in the worship of power so fully as the opinion polls now indicate. Perhaps they will turn on him. We cannot unwrite this page of our history, or even blot it out. But perhaps by destroying the career and execrating the memory of its author, we can yet rescue some of our self-respect.

The War: Won and Ended
John Greeley <J_Greenley@bigfoot.com>

Sean,

Saddam Hussein was dangerous. To the people of Iraq, to the people in the countries adjoining Iraq, and to the people of any nation he received as a threat to his power. (That would be you and me.) His invasions of his neighbours were, in the end, as ineffectual as his defence of his regime. But thousands of Kuwaitis and Iranians were no longer with their families after those wars were done. People driving a bus against an Abrams tank were even more ineffective, but anyone willing to do that was equally capable of flying a crop duster laden with bio/chemical agents over the skies of LA or sailing a tramp steamer with a nuclear weapon in her hold up the Thames. One doesn't need to be effective when playing with weapons of mass destruction, just persistent. If 4 out of 5 attempts fail, we still stand to lose thousands to millions to the successful.

What happened to Ali Ismael Abbas is horrible, whether the weapon that destroyed his home and family was dropped from a US/UK aircraft or launched from an Iraqi AAA battery before it went astray. But those who bemoan the fate of the thousand civilian casualties of this war need to remember that it ended a regime that killed thousands each month as a matter of course. In May of 2003, no one will have their tongue cut out and left to bleed to death for speaking against Saddam. In June of 2003, no family will have to pay for the bullet that killed their son or husband in order to take the body for burial. July will pass with no parent having to watch their daughters visit to a rape room. August's showers will be water, not hydrochloric acid. These things are ended, at least for a time. The suffering of what has been done pales in comparison with what WOULD have been suffered had the war not taken place. The math is simple, just unpleasant.

When people can stop evil and do nothing, they condone that evil, and thereby are guilty as well. I personally sleep a little better now. A threat is gone, and an evil is ended.

The War: A Brief Debate on Corporate Responsibility
Neil Lock and Sean Gabb

Dear Sean,

I've read your pieces in *Free Life* and *Free Life Commentary*. My view is, I didn't fire the rocket that maimed that boy. I wasn't part of the chain of command that ordered it fired. No-one consulted me about the war - and if they had done, I'd have said No. I didn't vote for Blair or any of its flunkies (nor for the other lot, either). Nothing, but nothing, I could have done or not done would have prevented that boy being maimed. So why should I feel any responsibility at all? I do not think that burdening myself with false guilt would do any good for me or for anyone else.

It is far better, I think, to aim to identify the individuals responsible, and to pin the blame on to them. If it was an American rocket, for example, then George W. Bush was one of those

responsible for the atrocity. And those responsible for atrocities deserve, in due time, suitable criminal punishment.

I'd be interested to know your thoughts on this.

Cheers,
Neil Lock

Sean Gabb Replies

Dear Neil,

Many thanks for your letter, which raises - yet again - one of the main points of difference between anarchists and minimal state libertarians.

Since you do not recognise the existence of nations, but only of individuals and voluntary organisations, you have the right to deny any responsibility for the maiming of that boy in Iraq, and of any other atrocities committed in the course of the war there.

However, I do recognise the existence of nations. They do not exist in the tangible sense, I grant. They are, instead, an idea. But the idea is very powerful. It gives a shape to the lives of millions, providing them with a feeling of identity. It is an idea for which people have been willing - rightly or not - to kill and even to die.

I do not think such nations can be regarded entirely as coerced associations - like a chain gang or the jumbles of peoples forced together in the old Soviet Empire, or in modern Iraq. They are different in the sense that the great majority of those within them accept the terms of association. This, by the way, is one reason why some countries are more stable than others: in some, nearly everyone accept the terms of association; while in others, many do not and long for a smaller association, in which they can identify with those they regard as their own.

Nations should, therefore, be regarded as corporations, in which the people are shareholders and the rulers are the directors. These directors do not need to have been elected, or to have been appointed by any other vaguely democratic means. They are, even so, accountable to the shareholders for their actions. And the shareholders, so far as they accept the terms of association, take some share of the responsibility for whatever is done in their names.

Though not entirely coercive in their nature, membership of such corporate bodies is not entirely voluntary. My wife, for example, chose to become a British citizen, and before then chose to live here, thereby becoming liable to obey the rules of the association. I could, if I wished, disclaim my membership, by becoming a citizen of her country. You have chosen another option, which is to deny the legitimacy of the British State, and to obey its rules only so far as they can be physically enforced.

I respect your choice, and would have the rules much lighter than they are. If I were in a position of authority, I would lighten the rules, and suspect that, in time, you would review your choice. I, however, freely accept my membership - even if I also deny the legitimacy of certain rules, which I regard - to keep up the corporate analogy - as *ultra vires*.

For this reason, I do have some share in the responsibility for the actions of the British State, and it is valid for me to feel some shame for whatever has been done in Iraq.

This is a short answer to a question that requires an entire thesis. But while I do not expect you to agree with me - nor to agree even if I provided the thesis - I hope that I have correctly described the essentials of what divides us.

With best wishes,
Sean

The Value of Education
by Sean Gabb
(First Published as *Free Life Commentary*,
issue 100, 9th April 2003)

I went yesterday evening to a seminar arranged in London by the Social Affairs Unit. This began with a brief lecture by Theodore Dalrymple, a doctor who writes an occasional column for *The Spectator*. His theme was "The Proletarianisation of British Culture". He explained how notions of politeness and restraint were vanishing from the middle classes, being replaced by an increasing vulgarity of thought and behaviour; and that this was not a vulgarity copied from the working classes, but was part of a general decline also affecting them. It was a brief lecture, and was intended as no more than a summary of the problem. The discussion was then thrown open for others to supply answers or other pertinent comments.

These seminars, I think, have been arranged to allow free discussion in private; and so I will not report the discussion, or even say who else was there. Instead, I will give my own thoughts on the problem. I believe that much of the vulgarity of thought and behaviour can be traced to a failure throughout the English speaking world, since about 1960, to understand the meaning and value of education.

I will not presume to say what is the purpose of life. Though I wish it were otherwise, I suspect there is no objective purpose, and it is up to us as individuals to supply our own. But whatever the case, I think it reasonable to say that our purpose ought to be to make ourselves as happy as we can, and to contribute as much as we can to the general stock of happiness.

Now, happiness comes in many forms and is found in many places. If we want ecstatic pleasure, that can be found in any number of legal and illegal substances. If we want uncomprehending contentment, there are lobotomies or courses of electric shock therapy. But given that most people reading this article are at least moderately intelligent, I will not bother with criticising these kinds of happiness. For us, happiness surely includes understanding and even wisdom. This requires some subordination of present to future objectives, and in particular getting the best education of which we are capable. I will define an educated person as someone who can hold an interesting conversation with himself throughout the whole uncertain course of his adult life - someone with a fair knowledge of human nature, a tolerance of the milder follies, an understanding of the limits of what is possible, a calm equanimity of temper, and, ideally, with a sense of humour. Some of these qualities are innate. Others must be acquired.

A person who possesses these qualities cannot fail to be an interesting and a pleasing companion to himself through life. And the existence of many such people, largely connected with each other, gives rise to what the economists call a positive externality. A country in which the tone of life is set by such a class of people is invariably a more pleasant place to be than a country where such a class does not exist. That country will be more beautiful in its arrangement of material objects, and more gentle in its courtesies. Its laws will be more humanely framed and more humanely applied. Its politics will be steadier in their course and more temperate in their ends. It will go to war less

often, and then mostly for the pursuit of legitimate interests. Because of the greater security of life and property, and the greater respect for thrift and sobriety, it will also be richer and more powerful.

Such an education means a training in habits of thought and the exercise of general intellectual ability. It may require the acquisition of specific skills - for example, learning at least one of the classical languages and few modern languages, and learning some of the technical aspects of music and the visual arts. It may also require an understanding of mathematics and of the natural sciences. It certainly requires a long study of literature and history and philosophy and law and political economy. But none of this may be useful in any direct financial sense.

This is not to disparage purely technical or professional training. These are not at all to be despised. Some while ago, I took a course in bookbinding, and was filled with respect for the skill and dedication of the old man who taught me. Accountancy and legal practice and medicine and the ability to see and make use of previously undiscovered business opportunities, are all of high value. But they are not in themselves education. My instructor in bookbinding was a man of wide culture. Not only did he know how to put books together, but he also had a strong appreciation of what he was putting together. I know accountants and lawyers and physicians who can keep me happily awake until three in the morning as we discuss the state of the world. That, however, is because they are not just what they have trained to become. It is because they are also educated men.

The problem we are now facing is largely the outcome of a decline of respect for humanistic education. My dear friend Dennis O'Keeffe is famous for his denunciations of what he calls socialist education - this being a denial that there is any value in the traditional curriculum, and that the cultures of all social classes and of all racial and national groups are equally valuable; and even that ours is inferior, so far as it contains within itself at least the implicit claim to general hegemony over all others. With this goes the dangerous absurdities of structuralism and post-modernism.

Of course, Dennis is right. But it is not only Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser and Herbert Bowles and Samuel Gintis who are to blame for the attack on humanism. It is also the intellectual philistinism of our own intellectual allies. When I was a boy, I got into an argument with my mathematics teacher, an Armenian Marxist who wore jeans in class and long leather boots spray painted green - this was the 1970s. I asked him one day what was the value of the simultaneous equations he was trying to teach us how to solve. He made what I now realise was a good attempt to explain their value, but began to lose his temper when I failed to understand him. Many years later, I read of a similar exchange in Alexandria between Euclid and one of his students. Euclid, it seems, did not even try to explain himself. Instead, he told his assistant to give the man his money back and throw him into the street.

I now understand the value of knowledge that has no immediate or obvious use. Sadly, many others who call themselves libertarians or conservatives do not. With their talk of "vocational learning" and "learning based outcomes", they deny the value of any education that is not directed to the gaining of marketable skills.

I know of schools that teach information technology but not history. Again, I do not dispute the value of technical skills. I am proud of my ability to build computers and to make software work: my own website is almost entirely crafted by hand in HTML. But history also is important. An accountant who is ignorant of the French Revolution, or cannot recognise sonata form, or knows not a line of poetry, is nothing more than a skilled barbarian. In a nation where only a small minority is truly educated, legal equality becomes a hard concept to maintain, let alone political equality. In a nation without even that minority, public life must inevitably become savage and

arbitrary - a thing of wild, inconstant passions, led by those unable to perceive or follow longer term goods.

That is where, I think, we are now fast approaching. We have a Prime Minister who cannot spell, and is not ashamed of the fact. We have a political class in general that lacks nearly all skill of persuasive speech and seems ignorant of the past. Of the first Ministers appointed to serve under Tony Blair, apparently, the majority listed football as their main hobby in their *Who's Who* entries; and not one listed any humanistic pursuit. I doubt if the Conservatives are much better. Perhaps the Judges and permanent heads of department will soon follow the trend. Little wonder our freedoms are being given up, one at a time, to moral panics and appeals to administrative convenience.

Is there anything to be done? I am not sure that there is in the short term. It takes centuries of moral evolution to achieve the level from which we have now declined. Between the renaissance vulgarities of behaviour described by Norbert Elias to the gentility of life in the 1900s lie 500 years of gradual improvement. To suppose that the present decline can be arrested and turned round in one lifetime is perhaps too optimistic. But there are certain steps that may easily be taken towards an eventual improvement. One of the participants in the seminar last night described how he had thrown out his television set, and how this had already contributed to the moral tone of his household. There is an example to be followed - and cheaply followed, bearing in mind the decadence of broadcasting.

Aside from this, we can hope for a collapse of the universities. There are always exceptions, but most are nowadays a combination of training schools for narrow professional disciplines, and academies of falsehood. George Orwell once declared of some absurdity "you need to be an intellectual to believe that". This needs now to be amended to "You need a degree to believe that". I am not sure the universities, taken as a whole, can be reformed: better, I suspect, either to wait for their natural decline into irrelevance or to shut them down at the first opportunity. One of the first acts of the Ayatollah Khomeini after taking power in Iran was to close all the universities for three years. The bloody revolution of which this was a part is, of course, to be condemned. But I have no doubt that Shiite theology and law were much closer to the humanistic ideal than the western sociology they replaced. Perhaps historians will one day trace the growing stability and democratisation of modern Iran to this educational reform.

But as my readers may have noticed, I tend to be better at describing problems than giving solutions to them. I can only conclude by thanking the Social Affairs Unit for inviting me to so stimulating a discussion, and to hope that I shall be invited to others in future.

The Value of Education: Reply to Sean Gabb
Thomas Leavitt <thomasleavitt@hotmail.com>

Sean,

A very worthy essay in defence of a "liberal" education.

But, on a subsidiary note: why the implied assumption that "ecstatic pleasure" is somehow unworthy or to be denigrated? I can't let the above remark go unchallenged, although I'm a less than worthy defendant of bodily pleasure.

The purely physical pleasures of a fresh strawberry (which I just finished eating a couple of, delicious!), the bed chamber, and a marijuana joint are one on a continuum... it is the way these

pleasures are utilized (excessive and destructive use, whether it be gluttony, addiction, or sloth) which is worthy of criticism, not the pleasure in and of itself.

You seem to imply that the enjoyment generated by these activities is somehow lesser (because they lack human agency?) and worthy of criticism, when placed in comparison with that generated in response to works generated by human effort. when in fact they are of an entirely different order and nature (being physical and biological in nature). If a man or woman's pleasures come equally from the physical, and intellectual, should he or she be judged inferior to one whose pleasures are purely intellectual (and what sort of cold beast would the latter be)?

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that even the pleasure derived from music and art is at least partially derived from their ability to tap into basic biological pleasure centres to at least some degree, and thus perhaps even the distinction outlined above is invalid (at least partially).

Regards,
Thomas Leavitt

The Value of Education: A Comment
Brian Micklethwait <brian@libertarian.co.uk>
(First Published on Brian's Education Blog,
www.brianmicklethwait.com,
18th April 2003)

Sean Gabb on liberal education

I have just been reading Sean Gabb's one hundredth Free Life Commentary, which is called The Value of Education and is about the importance of an all-round education of the "useless" variety, as opposed merely to the acquisition of marketable skills.

I know of schools that teach information technology but not history. Again, I do not dispute the value of technical skills. I am proud of my ability to build computers and to make software work: my own website is almost entirely crafted by hand in HTML. But history also is important. An accountant who is ignorant of the French Revolution, or cannot recognise sonata form, or knows not a line of poetry, is nothing more than a skilled barbarian. In a nation where only a small minority is truly educated, legal equality becomes a hard concept to maintain, let alone political equality. In a nation without even that minority, public life must inevitably become savage and arbitrary - a thing of wild, inconstant passions, led by those unable to perceive or follow longer term goods.

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That catches the drift. I remember having a similar argument at my school, with a Latin master inevitably. He spoke of Ovid's writings about bees, claiming that to have read this was to have learned something useful. So my school was already rotten with the importance of being useful, or he would have found a quite different way to defend Ovid. However else you sell it, you can't sell Latin as better science than science.

Sean's piece doesn't convince me of much, but it is, as always, beautifully written, and Sean does at least explain nicely why such a thing is good to have. It makes your own company more pleasing. A liberal education – in the sense of lots of interesting things to think about and the habit of

thinking intelligently about them – is accordingly an economic benefit every bit as palpable as an education in html or accountancy.

The availability of such writings as Sean's on the Internet illustrates that a liberal education is now easier to obtain than ever before. And even if the Internet didn't exist, there are all the newly liberated TV channels, a few of which provide quite cultured stuff, in among all the rubbish, that is to say in among all the stuff I don't care for. And then there are the remainder shops, which are now an amazing source of wisdom and learning.

As to the loss of our freedoms, would a different educational syllabus during the last few decades really have made that much difference? They had philistines in the nineteenth century. They may have known more Latin than the present cabinet does, but they were philistines nevertheless. And by the same token there are plenty of widely read people now, who acquaint themselves with many different things, but just with different different things to their grandparents. There's a certain sort of person – Sean and I are two such, although our preferred fields of study are not at all the same – who pride themselves on the broadness of their reading and thinking. Such people will always dig beneath the surface of whatever they learn, useful or useless, to the deeper meanings and profundities of their civilisation, and of other civilisations. Even if our exam results driven and vocationally obsessed schools stop bothering with such things, they will still continue.

Insofar as our bit of civilisation does need its freedoms rescuing, such a rescue is far more likely to come from the philistine USA than from the educated elites of continental Europe, whose critiques of American culture - i.e. lack of culture - Sean partly echoes. Those vulgar Americans seem to have at least as firm a grasp of our freedoms and their tendency to get lost as any product of Balliol or the Sorbonne. And the texture of their civilisation isn't that bad either.

I'm tempted to observe, so I will, that a liberal education is merely the mastery of a few techniques which happen to be obsolete, like sonata form or composing Latin verse, plus some history of a sort that has now been updated out of regular existence with the passing of time. Why concocting appalling poetry in a dead language is any better for your mind than playing adventure games on a computer or training to be a surgeon I truly do not know, and learning about sonatas dates from the time, now gone, when if you wanted to listen to music that was even adequately musical without going to a rare and expensive and probably hard-to-get-to concert, your, or your wife, or your friends, or your servants, had to make it for you. Knowing sonatas used to be a skill as relevant to enjoying life as knowing html or how to set the video is now.

I dare say that in centuries to come, people will not be considered truly educated unless they have a smattering of at least two obsolete programming languages.

But please don't let me put you off reading Sean's piece. No doubt many readers of this will agree more with him than with me about these matters.

Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement and the British Road to War

Frank McDonagh

Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1998, 196pp, £14.99 (pbk)

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I read through this book during my lunch break today, sat in an unusually warm and sunny Kensington park. An old man saw the cover with its bold title and rather nice line drawing of Chamberlain. "Neville Chamberlain?" He said to me with an accusing stare. "What a wanker he was." I thought of putting the book down and starting an argument about the realities of British foreign policy before 1940. But lunch breaks for me are far too unusual for wasting on argument with someone who would only start ranting about Saddam Hussein and plastic shredders or whatever - and I get quite enough of that from the Internet. So I smiled and carried on reading.

His reaction, though, was no more than the conventional wisdom. Despite more than 30 years of revisionist scholarship, Neville Chamberlain is still seen by the world exactly as those in and around the first Churchill Government wanted him to be seen. That view is of a weak and confused man out of his depth in the snakepit of European politics. With his rolled umbrella and wing collar, he blundered round Europe in the late 1930s, deceived at every point by bad men of greater intelligence, but hoping that he could settle German demands for territory as peacefully as he might settle a strike in a Birmingham button factory. In the process, he refused to let the country re-arm sufficiently to face the inevitable conflict in defence of liberal civilisation. His name has become shorthand for weakness and self-delusion in foreign policy. "Appeaser" has become one of the ultimate insults in political debate throughout the English-speaking world; and every argument over the present war with Iraq must include some slighting reference to Neville Chamberlain and some lavish praise of Winston Churchill, his apparently more realistic and courageous antithesis.

In fact, this view of Chamberlain has largely disappeared from the scholarly literature. What we have instead is a cool understanding of the limitations of British power in a changing and increasingly hostile world. This book expresses the view briefly yet fully, and it gives useful extracts in support from contemporary documents, and contains a good bibliography for further reading. As such, it is an excellent introduction to the subject for students and for those simply interested in the approach to the greatest war ever fought by this country and the last in which it entered as a primary belligerent.

And that is all I will say about the book. I am reviewing it simply as an excuse for writing more about British foreign policy - this time from the perspective of the 1930s.

Undoubtedly, the Great War had been a disaster for this country. It was an act of stupidity to enter it, and even more stupid not to try for a negotiated settlement in 1916. It had killed nearly a million men, and left many more maimed. Its financial cost had been immense, requiring heavy taxes and a devaluation of Sterling, and a tenfold increase in the national debt. It had also distorted patterns of investment. The vast overseas portfolio built up during the previous generations had been partly liquidated and replaced by heavy indebtedness to American interests. Internally, capital had diverted into an unsustainable expansion of heavy industry - areas in which the country had for some time been losing its comparative advantage, and the products of which could no longer be readily sold in an increasingly fragmented and economically hostile world market. The years before 1914 were not some long, golden summer. But to those looking back from the years after 1918, that is how they often seemed.

But while disastrous, the Great War had not for us been a catastrophe. It was, in various ways, for Germany, France, Russia and Turkey - but not for us. It had not been fought on our territory. Nor had it been followed by any serious challenge to the established order. Though these did not at all justify the heavy costs, it had even been attended by certain benefits. Germany and Russia and Turkey were destroyed by defeat and revolution. France was prostrate. The United States had briefly emerged as an active great power, only to return to a determined isolationism. In terms of naval supremacy and imperial security, the country was restored to something like the position it

had enjoyed after Waterloo. And, while taking the German colonies was of no value, the despoiling of Turkey had given us control over the Middle East and its increasingly important oil reserves.

By 1920, it was clear that the Great War had ripped holes in the financial web that had once bound the world to the City of London. There could be no exact return to the position of 1914. But, if it had shaken the foundations of British power, the War had not undermined them. Something like the old position could still be restored. It was necessary to make a complex and difficult set of changes. At home, it was necessary to cut taxes and spending back towards the levels of 1914, and to force down the price level to the point where the gold standard could be restored at the old parity. At the same time, the over-expansion of heavy industry had to be reversed, so that labour and capital could flow into the more productive new sectors - cars, chemicals, electricals, general light engineering, and so forth.

In the Empire, it was necessary to reduce the commitment to India - returning to something like the system of indirect rule used before the Mutiny - and to shift the balance of imperial interest to the now more valuable Middle East. Outside the Empire, it was necessary to restore as much as possible of the old financial and trading system.

Any one of these required much effort and some luck to achieve. Astonishingly, most of them had been achieved after a fashion by the 1930s. The Great Depression had put an end for the moment to hard money and free trade, but caused little harm overall to the domestic economy. The unemployment and other hardships were mostly confined to the declining heavy industries. From the Midlands down, the country was enjoying a steady increase of output and living standards. Indeed, looked at from about 1935, the Great Depression seemed to serve British world interests rather well.

After 1918, the only potential challenger was the United States. Its size and wealth appeared to place it beyond all hope of competition. If it wanted to outbuild the Royal Navy, it could. However, its prevailing constitutional and moral order made a challenge unlikely. Though it might take an occasional interest outside the Americas, it was essentially isolationist. Though it might have the cash to challenge British primacy, it lacked the will. It had been tricked into the Great War to serve British interests. Now, it had largely withdrawn. The Great Depression seemed to confirm its impotence. The general collapse of its economy after 1931, and the emergence of mass unemployment - averaging, I think, around 35 million - threw it proportionately into a scale of suffering quite unknown in this country. Moreover, the election of Franklin Roosevelt had opened it to a departure from economic orthodoxy that opinion in this country rightly saw as likely to keep it in depression for as far ahead as could reasonably be seen.

All this country needed to consolidate the recovery was time - time for the new arrangements at home and abroad to take full effect. What had to be avoided at all costs was another big war. That would destroy all the cautious but solid progress made since the removal of Lloyd George from power in 1922. The Treaty of Locarno had got us out of all practical European connections after 1925 - the guarantee to both France and Germany was in effect a guarantee to neither, as it justified a refusal to enter into close military relations with either. The League of Nations was a useful means of imposing British will elsewhere in the world where it was no longer convenient to act unilaterally.

By 1935, the country had never in living memory enjoyed such profound home and imperial security, or spent so little of the national income on defence. Let all this continue, and by 1960, the financial and strategic costs of the Great War would have scarred over as surely as those of the Napoleonic wars had a century before.

This is the background against which Adolf Hitler was viewed by this country's ruling class. There is no need, I think, to argue that he was a thoroughly bad man. He turned Germany into a semi-socialist police state, and tainted with his embrace what had previously been one of the homelands of liberal civilisation. However, I share the official perception of his early years that he was no threat to this country. His published writings and speeches at the time, and his private conversations made available after his death, all point to a settled ambition. This was to expand German power deep into Eastern Europe. He wanted to gather up the Germanic fragments of the Habsburg Empire under his own rule, and to conquer large colonies of settlement for the German people in Poland and western Russia. That was the consistent purpose of his foreign policy in the east. In the west, his only declared and perceptible aim was to reach a settlement with Britain that would give him a free hand in the east.

Yes, we are told endlessly that his eastern policy was just his first step to conquering the world. Give him Poland and Western Russia and their great resources, the claim goes, and give him the lack of an enemy to the east - Soviet Russia being destroyed - and he would surely turn eventually on Britain. I suppose he might have. But he might also have died his hair green, or applied to join a *kibbutz*, or had an early sex change operation. In deciding what someone might have done in circumstances different from those he actually faced, we can say nothing for sure. If we want to say anything at all, we can only do so in the light of his stated or revealed intentions. For Hitler, there is no evidence that his ambitions stretched to a conquest or even a humbling of Britain.

He had a sincere, if not always well informed, admiration of Britain and the British Empire. He respected our victory in the Great War, and wanted to avoid another conflict. He did not share the desire of other German nationalists for a return of the lost German colonies. He had no interest in naval construction, and went out of his way to condemn the naval race that had poisoned Anglo-German relations after 1898. He signed a naval agreement with us in 1935, and I think this is the only treaty he ever made that he took care to observe. When the Arabs rose against us in Palestine, they sent emissaries to him in Berlin, seeking financial support. Since they were all good anti-semites, one might have thought they would reach a deal. But Hitler refused all help, declaring in effect that he would not lift a finger against white rule over the coloured races.

It is possible that victory in the east would have raised his ambitions in the west. We cannot be sure that it would not. But neither can we assume that he would have been any more successful in his invasion of Russia than he actually was after June 1941. Without facing us, he would not have had to divide his forces between France, North Africa and the Balkans. At the same time, he would not have had forces hardened in those wars, or the record of invincibility that for a while silenced his internal critics. And the Russian winters would have been no less ruinous of invaders than it had always been before. He would probably have taken Moscow and Leningrad. But I do not know how much further into the Eurasian landmass he could have reached. He would have faced much the same war of attrition with the partisans, and would probably have had to keep a vast army of occupation in the east before it could be made safe for German settlement. He might well have been able to present no threat of any kind to the west. His only contact with us might have been endless requests for loans, and complaints at our unwillingness to join his crusade against Bolshevism.

Even otherwise, he would have dominated much the same area as Stalin did after 1945, and done so at a comparative disadvantage. Most obviously, he was not the acknowledge head of an international conspiracy to spread his rule. He had no bands of committed followers stirring up trouble everywhere from China to Peru. As its name suggests, national socialism was not an ideology for export. It was an ideology of Aryan domination. Even in other Aryan countries, it had little following. Oswald Mosley made a big noise in this country for a while, but never came close to electoral significance. Under Soviet rule after 1945, the Slavs of Eastern Europe went into their

factories and film studios and, for a while, worked with something like unforced gratitude for their masters. Under Hitler, they had to be coerced from the start.

Granted, his economic policies were less insanely destructive. At the same time, the expectations of his people were higher, and they had been less frightened by his tyranny out of expressing them. And he was a socialist. If he had presided over a recovery from the Great Depression, that recovery was running into trouble after 1938. Inflation could only be hidden by wage and price controls, and was evidenced instead by shortages of consumer goods - see, for example, how the German forces sent into the Czechlands in March 1939 stripped the shops in Prague bare of things like razor blades and overcoats. Not all the frenzied rhetoric in the world could have saved Hitler's revolution from running out of steam after 1940. It was only the war that kept up a semblance of prosperity into the middle of the decade.

A German domination of the east might have involved us eventually in a cold war. But ours would have been an unexhausted, unbankrupted, unhumiliated Britain and British Empire. There would have been no American support. Neither though would there have been need of any.

There are two further points to be made against me. The first was made by a friend last week, as we sat arguing over what I have just written. Suppose, he asked, Hitler had not only failed to conquer Russia, but had lost. Suppose Stalin had all by himself beaten Hitler and conquered all the way to Germany. Would this not have been worse for us? There would have been no limit to the prestige of Communism, and every Comintern agitator throughout the world would have had a glorious time against liberal civilisation. At least in the real war, the victory was shared between us and them.

I have no answer to this point. It requires more detailed understanding than I have of the relative balance of forces in hypothetical circumstances between Russia and Germany. But while it strikes me as reasonable to say that Hitler might not have won very easily, I find it hard to believe that he could have lost to Stalin.

The second point is the atrocities committed by the Germans. These are often used as justification for going to war. Do I not care about these? My answer is that I do not think they were grounds in themselves for war. An individual has all manner of moral responsibilities, and looking to these will by no means be always in his own interest. A government, however, is a trustee of the nation to which it is accountable, and must look only to the interests of that nation. It would be wrong for our government to visit positive evils on foreigners. It would be right for it to perform such good offices for them as did not involve much cost to us. But it has neither the duty nor the right to go about the world acting as some knight errant, putting down the bad and raising the good. When we talk about the British Government, the adjective is at least as important as the noun.

It must also be said that the worst atrocities were committed towards the end of a general war, and do not seem to have been long premeditated. They happened at a time in which fear of defeat and a misplaced desire for revenge had extinguished the usual moral feeling, and in places far removed from the battlefields that most attracted western curiosity. I have no doubt that an invasion of Russia after about 1943 would have resulted in great atrocities. But I do doubt if these would have been so bloody as the ones actually on record.

Of course, we cannot be definite on what would have happened had there been no outbreak of war in 1939. But the worst I can imagine for us is no worse than did happen after 1945. And it could easily have been better.

This being so, it was not our business if Hitler wanted to tear up the 1919 settlement in the east. It involved us in dangers that can only now be demonstrated behind a mass of subjunctives. Nor, to be

fair, was there anything we could have done to stop him. Our guarantee to Poland was a nonsense, bearing in mind our lack of ability to send help. Even if we had - as is often urged - intervened to stop the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, or the union with Austria, or the occupation of the Sudetenland, we probably had not the military power to enforce our will, even against a Hitler weaker than he became. Nor would there have been the public support at home or abroad to legitimise such pre-emptive actions.

And so the policy of Neville Chamberlain was neither cowardly nor absurd. It reflected the realities of British power and British interests at that time. I do not accept the accusations of some American conservatives that Winston Churchill was equal to Hitler or Stalin in his infamy. They are angry that he got their country into a war from which it emerged supreme abroad but ruined in its constitutional and moral order at home. I sympathise with this complaint. But he was in every sense a better person.

Even so, did ruin this country. He did so because he never understood the true foundations of British greatness. He saw that splash of red on the map of the world, and never realised that he was looking only at the effect, not at the cause. His ambition was "to make the old dog sit up and wag its tail". In fact, what he wanted for us before 1940, and what he did to us after, was the equivalent of making an invalid get up from his bed and dance too soon after an operation. He brought on the collapse that the Great War had only threatened. He undermined the foundations of our greatness abroad, and at home acted as the front man for a socialist revolution. For five years, he dressed and spoke and acted as if the traditional order was safe in his hand - while quietly behind his back it was taxed and regulated and smeared out of existence. "Why worry? We've had a Labour Government since 1940" was the comment of one observer after the 1945 general election.

All considered, the 20th century as it actually ran was not too bad for this country. We did not lose any big wars, or have a revolution or civil war. We did not even suffer a real economic or financial collapse. Within a few years of each of the two big wars, we had recovered our old living standards in full and were making rapid continued progress. We ended the century as the third or fourth richest and the second most powerful country in the world. We are even remarkably free in practice to live as we please. We did far better than I think we deserved. But it could have been better still. If only we had kept out of those dreadful wars and remained masters of our own fate, the whole world, I have no doubt, would have been a better place.
