

THE PEACE CONFERENCE

Sun 26th Feb 2006 1400-2200 Portland Building

1400-1615 The "War on Terror" Comes Home (ECL)

Milan Rai (Justice Not Vengeance)

Alan Simpson (Labour MP for Nottingham South)

Sam Azad (International Federation of Iranian Refugees)

Including group discussion of How can we really prevent terror? and How can we protect our civil liberties from anti-terror measures?

1630-1830 Overcoming Media Bias (ECL)

Richard Keeble (Professor of Journalism, Uni of Lincoln)

Meryl Aldridge (Reader in Sociology of News Media, Uni of Nottingham)

Nottinghamshire Indymedia

Including group discussion of How can we overcome media bias? and How can we develop independent media?

FREE ENTRY

1930-2100 Taking Action (Various rooms)

Black Activism - NSPM & Blackdrop

Recycling Art & Banner Making - The Mischief Makers

Campaigning for Civil Liberties? - Campaign Against Criminalising Communities, No2ID,

Nottingham Trent Peace & Liberty Forum

Independent Media - The Ceasefire Workshop: All about the media.

2100-2115 Conclusions (ECL)

Food by Veggies & The Crocus Cafe (atrium)

Stalls from local campaigns (atrium)

CEASE FIRE

Magazine of the Nottingham Student Peace Movement
Email: sunspm@nottingham.ac.uk Website su.nottingham.ac.uk/~nspm

Issue 7 - Feb 2006
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Nukes: Either you get them, or we get you! Hich Yezza

It has now been five years since the drum roll for the invasion/occupation of Iraq started and how little change do five years bring! The same coarsening of the rhetoric, the same invocation of imminent threats to the very stability of the space-time continuum that we had heard in reference to Iraq are now being hastily reheated around Iran, of course certain things *have* changed. Bush & co have all but squandered the moral capital they had garnered post-911 which has meant the docile domestic consensus is now replaced by increasingly vocal opposition by the democrats as well as the wider antiwar movement.

Militarily, the possibility of a full-scale US invasion is almost non-existent after the debacle in Iraq. But there is no doubt some form of military aggression being considered (and planned, according to some analysts). Not only is this against international law (anyone remembers this?) but it would almost certainly result in the current Middle-Eastern chaos to multiply a thousand-fold. Iran has made its intentions very clear about retaliating if attacked and most military experts agree that it has the means to deliver on its word.

The major issue, of course, when it comes to nuclear disarmament is the fact that the international treaties, signed with great fanfare since the seventies have little or no meaning to anyone but the very weak. The top nuclear nations have made a mockery of their commitment to engage in a worldwide effort to rid the planet of these catastrophes-in-waiting. For those nations queuing up to join the Nuclear VIP club, there is no better incentive to hurry in their efforts than to see the respect and regard accorded to those who have gone down that path, India, Pakistan, Israel are virtually immune to any form of military pressure and they know it. Even the tiny North Korea openly taunts Bush and his impotence to do anything remotely belligerent against the third member of the infamous "axis". Indeed, at the time when Iraq was pleading with the world that they had no WMDs, North Korean officials were virtually screaming from the rooftops to anyone who'd listen that not only they possessed the fabled Nukes but were not afraid to use them. The US reaction to those two very different messages (Attacking the first, and pleading with China to reason with the second) has been a very eloquent lesson to all those third world nations worried about being bullied by the world's sole super power. Nuclear disarmament might not be the cause of the moment, but it will not go away and though it's not too late to do something about it, time is running out, fast.

Visit www.cnduk.org for more information.

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NEWS: Mr Blair Comes to Nottingham

Daniel Binns

Protesters Welcome Prime Minister to Nottingham University

Possibly the largest radical student protest in the University's history was held on Saturday January 14th when Prime Minister Tony Blair visited the main campus (the East Midlands Conference Centre to be precise) for a Labour party policy forum. Despite being on a cold Saturday morning (as the day wore on it began to rain), and despite it all happening right in the middle of the January exam period, over a hundred students turned out in force, along with local residents and Trent university students to protest against Blair's wars and nuclear policies. What was even more remarkable was that the protest was organised with just 24 hours notice by the Peace Movement. Blair's visit was intended to be a secret event, attended solely by Labour Party members and the press. However, it is believed details of the visit leaked out to students after members of the University Labour Society were invited to attend. The day's events were both remarkable and unique, and certainly disproved the widely-held idea that Nottingham Students are a bunch of apathetic layabouts - well, maybe it proved that not *all* of them are like this...But it also raised wider questions of the right to protest too...

It all began with a march through the campus, from the Portland Building, past the library and Downs, and then finishing by blockading the entrance and car park to the conference centre by sitting in the road. This was achieved by a brilliant strategic trick - the march seemed to be heading straight down the Downs towards the sports hall and road, when everyone suddenly veered off through some woodland, emerging triumphantly right outside the conference centre, taking the police by surprise, and forcing Blair to get into the conference centre by the back entrance.

Protesters continued their sit-down protest by the front entrance - but in fact they had no choice, as the police quickly began to form a cordon around the protesters, refusing to allow anyone to leave or enter for over two hours until Blair had left the area. Their reasons for doing this were vague and confusing, different police officers invoked different pieces of legislation, from the Criminal 'Justice' Act to various Terrorism Acts. Among those trapped in the police cordon were children, elderly women and local newspaper journalists. Police also took photographs of every protester. Other students in the area were searched by police, and a smaller group of late had to conduct their protest from the Downs, as police refused to allow them anywhere near the scene.

Protesters soon broke out into chants of "our right to protest", and further anger was created when one student was "temporarily detained" (i.e. arrested) for breaking through the cordon and handing out leaflets to conference delegates. Many became frustrated as the day wore on: people needed food, the toilet, local residents needed to collect their children from various things, and those, like me, who had exams, wanted to get back and revise! Yet the police refused to let anyone leave. The situation seemed paradoxical - we weren't allowed to protest where we were (apparently), but we also weren't allowed to leave. One student was threatened with arrest after waving his banner in front of a police cameraman, blocking his view. Why the police felt the need to videotape people peacefully protesting is, of course, open to debate...However, one consolation was that apparently our chants could be heard inside the building.

It seems control inside the conference centre was even tighter, with all media representatives being asked to leave during the Prime

Minister's question and answer session for fears of anyone heckling. Another intriguing aspect of the event was that the President of the Labour society had allegedly been warned by the Labour party, according to insider sources, that his political future would be "in doubt" if there was any trouble at the event. Security officials had been on campus all week preparing for the visit, and the campus was swamped with hundreds of police. Clearly, Blair and his evil henchmen did not want to come face-to-face with any dissent. Yet, while Blair did avoid seeing the mass of angry politically-active students, a couple did manage to confront him as he left (again) by the back entrance, shouting at him as he got into his car. Eventually, after Blair had left, the police allowed everyone to leave, and the crowd dispersed, with a sense of both frustration and accomplishment.

Overall, the whole incident raises questions about what so called Criminal Justice and Terrorism legislation is actually for - making Britain a safer place to live in, or restricting forms of criticism of those in power? And what did the day's events mean for Nottingham? Well, the day should certainly be going down in the university's history as a significant landmark. However this is unlikely, largely due to the fact that most students (and staff) didn't even know it happened! The event was covered by the student radio station URN the following Monday and was the main headline on BBC Local News East Midlands Today - but both programmes seemingly are not widely listened to/watched by Nottingham students. Moreover, the main source of campus news - Impact magazine - will not be covering it. Impact's offices in the Portland building recently suffered a break-in in which a design computer was stolen, and so the January/February issue was cancelled. The news is now too "old" to be included in the next issue, or its recently-launched

website. Other uni rag Sanctuary also has not covered the story.

However, it was clearly the largest radical student protest on campus for...well, a long time. Nottingham being famed for apathy, this could even be a first - who knows? But the day's protest showed that there are still students about who care enough to get out there and make their voice heard. For all those who attended, the memory will certainly live on, as a day when the university became a place of radicalism, where students actually tried to make a difference.

CEASEFIRE

Official Magazine of the
Nottingham Student Peace
Movement

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EDITORIAL

Hich Yezza

Dear friend,

Listen very carefully, for this is serious, I mean it. Now, you are a fairly nice and pleasant person, this we know, you're also busy, what with your ludicrously hectic social life and the odd hour you have to dedicate to your studies but we need to ask you for a favour.

You see, we want you to come on spend a Sunday afternoon and evening with us, yes, we want you to come to campus on a Sunday, to make your way through to the Portland Building and to go upstairs on the C floor. We want you to take a good look at the people there, their faces: eager with hope and heavy with expectation. We want you to take a seat and open your eyes, your ears and your mind. We want you to listen, because what you will hear will change your life.

We live in rather troubled times, gloom is in the air, what with all the stories about the impending doom awaiting our environment, the unsustainable economic haemorrhage currently taking place that will suck us back into the stone age once we run out of stuff to burn. But that is not the mood you will be sensing on Sunday, Au contraire! You will hear about hope, determination, solutions and actions to deliver them. We want you to be part of

something big, something full of goodwill and generosity and community and empathy.

You don't have to stay if you don't wish to, but we do ask that you at least show up and give yourself a chance to think about different things, to think in a different way and to start seeing the world from a different, truer angle.

The Peace conference, for this is what we're inviting you to, is taking place on Sunday 26th Feb and will feature prominent activists, experts and politicians talking about the war on terror, about the media, about the environment, there will be workshops, discussions, poetry, creative arts, food and a LOT of loud thinking.

We urge you to attend, and we urge you to bring your friends, because we're all in this together and the more people know about the issues the more likely we are to deal with them properly and quickly.

On more thing: entry is free! So come join us, for this is an offer you can't afford to refuse.

Visit our website:
su.nottingham.ac.uk/~nspm
for more details

ACTIVISM NEWS

March the 18th

Sam Walton

On March the 18th there is a Demonstration: A big one. In London. It's been called by Stop the War Coalition, CND and MAB to get the TROOPS HOME FROM IRAQ, and to tell Bush, Bliar and their neo-imperialist cronies: DON'T ATTACK IRAN. Its date is set to coincide with the third anniversary of the illegal invasion of Iraq.

The presence of foreign troops in Iraq is only exacerbating the problems of Iraq, a view backed up by British military chiefs, and the fact that in the recent election there, the party that did the best was the one which called for a pull out of the troops is further proof if any was needed.

The treat of military action against Iran is also very real, even though Iran has complied fully with all weapon inspections, and even allowed extra inspection,

in full compliance with the nuclear Non-Proliferation-Treaty, unlike some ***usa&uk***, and hasn't invaded anywhere recently.

The March isn't just in London though, it's a global day of action, and it's vital that people around the world see that people in "the belly of the beast" object to these neo-imperialist policies. The March is about everything! It's about women's rights, the suffering they have to bear as victims; it's about opposing new nuclear weapons, and the nuclear hypocrisy of Britain rearming while telling others not to; it's about human rights and torture, here and all over the world; it's about stopping the arms trade, and selling guns to anybody, including Iran and Iraq; it's about civil liberties; it's about our freedom to protest; and it's about

telling Bush and Bliar where they can shove their imperialist war.

So, how can you get there? It's in London! Easier done than said.

There are the normal arrangements of coaches from outside the Salutation Inn; Stop the War, NSPM and the Nottingham Trent Forum for Peace and Liberty are organising a university coach which will pick people up from the universities and take them straight to London, at a heavily discounted price.

There's also the possibility of discounted entry to that night's Demo at Blueprint - Nottingham's Nicest Night.

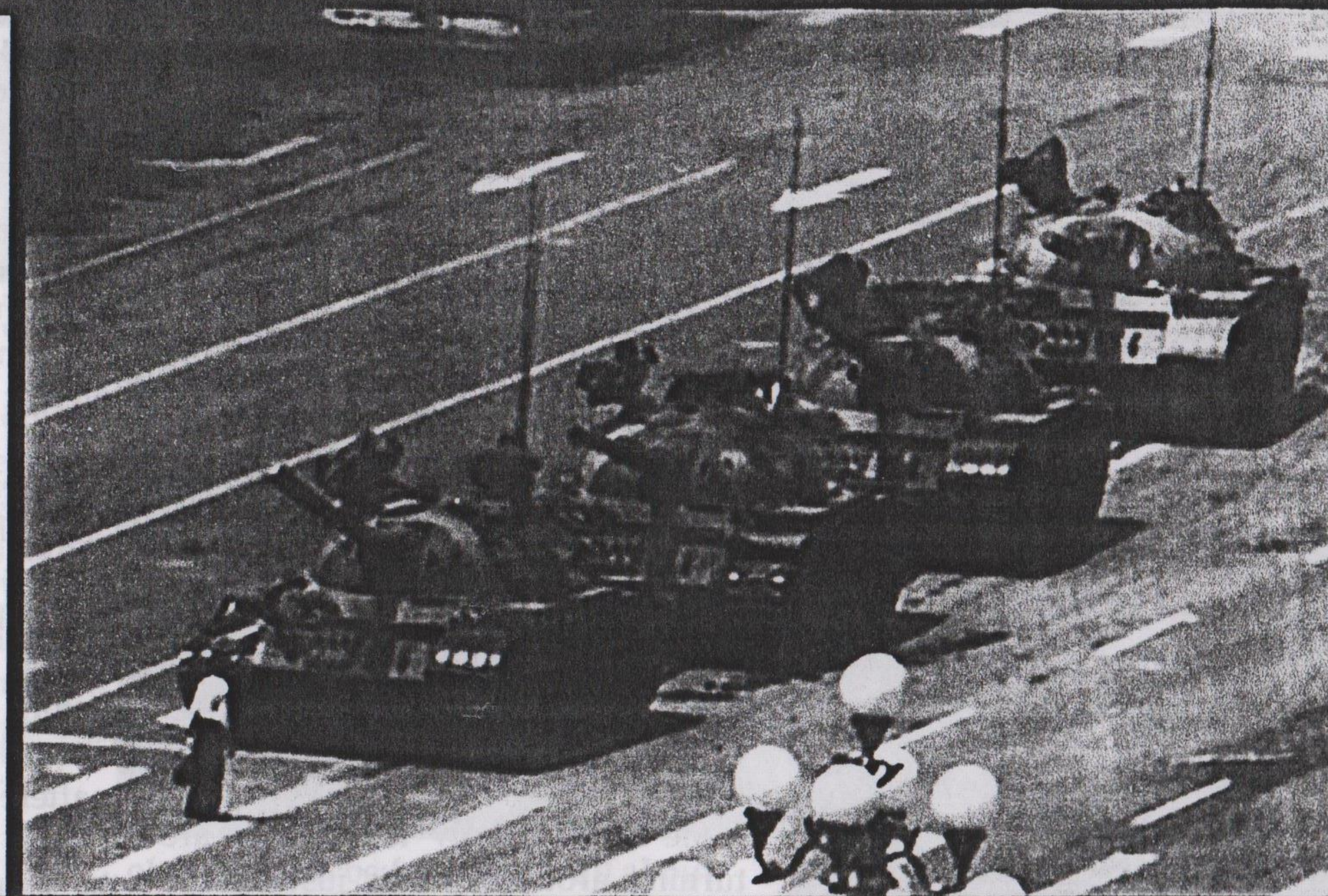
For details of coaches email: sunspm@gwmail.nottingham.ac.uk. SEE YOU THERE!!!!!!

QUESTIONS OF OUR TIME

We've all seen that iconic picture of a single man holding a groceries bag and refusing to budge from the path of four menacing tanks. That was 1989 in Tiananmen Square, Beijing China and the whole world was watching.

What nobody seems to know though is what happened next?

Do you know the answer? If yes, email us at ceasefiremag@yahoo.co.uk (Alright, alright! Googling is allowed)



ON-CAMPUS EVENTS

'What on earth is going on?'

The saga of the Danish cartoons

A Public talk by Professor Hugh Goddard

Professor of Christian-Muslim Relations

University of Nottingham

Followed by an open discussion

THURSDAY 2nd MARCH

@ 6.30PM

Room B46 Trent Building

IN FOCUS: PEACE CONFERENCE

Letters from Prison

By Milan Rai

student and President of the Nottingham Student Peace Movement (NSPM)

RANDOM REMARKS FOR RADICALS No. 15: Comfort Zones

(Wednesday 23 November 2005)

Yesterday (22 November) I received a letter from Nottingham Student Peace Movement, musing on the scope and limits of university activism. (Incidentally, the letter is dated 21 November, so you have some idea of how fast things are turning around at this just-in-time (or is that stuck-in-time) prison.)

Dan Robertson expresses frustration at the unwillingness of many students to 'leave their comfort zone to take more radical positions'. Now I think by now you know what is going to happen. I'm going to take some of Chomsky's comments on the topic, reproduce them in somewhat less elegant language, and embroider them.

As an academic, Chomsky has had a lot of time to think about the topic, but he's rarely written about it. One point he has made about the academic scene is that there is a dramatic change of attitude between students and even young faculty, who are only a year or so away from being students themselves.

He also points out the recurring pattern of students going off for summer jobs at commercial law firms, for example, thinking they are only going to earn some money, to help them with their debts, and then coming back with an entirely different outlook, often wearing different clothes.

Every radical student knows about the hidden agenda of the classroom; and the tacit lessons taught

unobtrusively in the course of the school day, lessons in obedience and conformity.

The same is true, even more powerfully, of the re-shaping that goes on under the surface at work – even at university.

Another foundational remark from Chomsky concerns the objectives of university reform. Now barely detectable as a live issue, university reform (in a liberatory sense) was a major concern thirty years ago. Chomsky pointed out that what mattered was not alterations to boards of trustees or such like, but the content of the curriculum and the relationship between staff and students.

In passing, one might note the same about industrial relations, and the workplace. As we have seen in Germany recently, putting a few token trade unionists on a board is more likely to lead to corruption of the labour movement leadership than real changes towards industrial democracy on the shop floor.

Universities are locations of enormous privilege and provide students and faculty with intellectual skills, wide resources and considerable leisure, which can and should be used to contribute intellectually as well as bodily to movements for social change.

Chomsky says that intellectuals should make their ideas dominant by their excellence. Quite a challenge, but it's hard to see what the alternative there is.

Okay, back to "comfort zones", and student activism. Why should someone become active, and take some part in a movement – "join" the movement? Why should they take a more sceptical attitude towards the mainstream media and official propaganda – let alone the

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accepted framework of the social sciences, for example?

The only reasons that might move someone would be (a) a compelling and irrefutable picture of something that they find outrageous and (b) compelling and irrefutable arguments that undermine official lies and received wisdom. What often provides the key for change is something that makes the picture or the argument human.

Chomsky is very self-deprecating about his own tactical judgements. One example he has given is the sanctuary offered by MIT students to a US soldier who had gone Absent Without Official Leave (AWOL) in protest against the Vietnam War. Chomsky argued against it – I think because he thought it would receive too little support, and would fall flat.

In the event, the sanctuary was a massive success, with students flocking up to the hall where Mike (I forget his surname) was staying.

Teachers moved their classes there, students slept there; the sanctuary apparently changed opinion on campus. Instead of arguing in the abstract, students were confronted with a young person much like themselves, facing an appalling decision, and they changed their minds as the arguments were put in this new human framework, with a new sense of immediacy (Face-to-face, hands-on, immediate involvement. Familiar?).

The sanctuary ended when Mike was arrested and taken off to face military courts. The effect on MIT seems to have been substantial and lasting.

So why would someone move out of their comfort zone – whether on campus or anywhere else? There are lots of reasons not to. In marketing, in the commercial world, there is an emphasis on understanding and resonating with the attitudes of those you are trying to influence, repeating your message regularly and in a variety of ways. Advertising is based on manipulation, campaigning is about

honesty and persuasion, but there are useful lessons that we can learn, nevertheless.

Dan writes, quite rightly, 'even the realisation that those calling for radical change are not easily pigeon-holed and derided [as] "hippies" or "nihilists", but are compassionate and intelligent human is actually an important step in some cases.' This applies outside university as well. Finally, there is another attitude shift which is of equal importance, which is for intellectuals, whether "radical", "liberal" or "conservative", to rid themselves of the delusion that their form of literacy and education means that they are both more intelligent and (therefore) more suited to dominate and rule the less-highly-schooled. Intellectuals must free themselves of the contempt for "the masses" which has undermined movements for social change in the past. If they can form a true partnership with other working people, intellectuals can help rather than hinder social progress.



Milan Rai at a peace rally in 2005

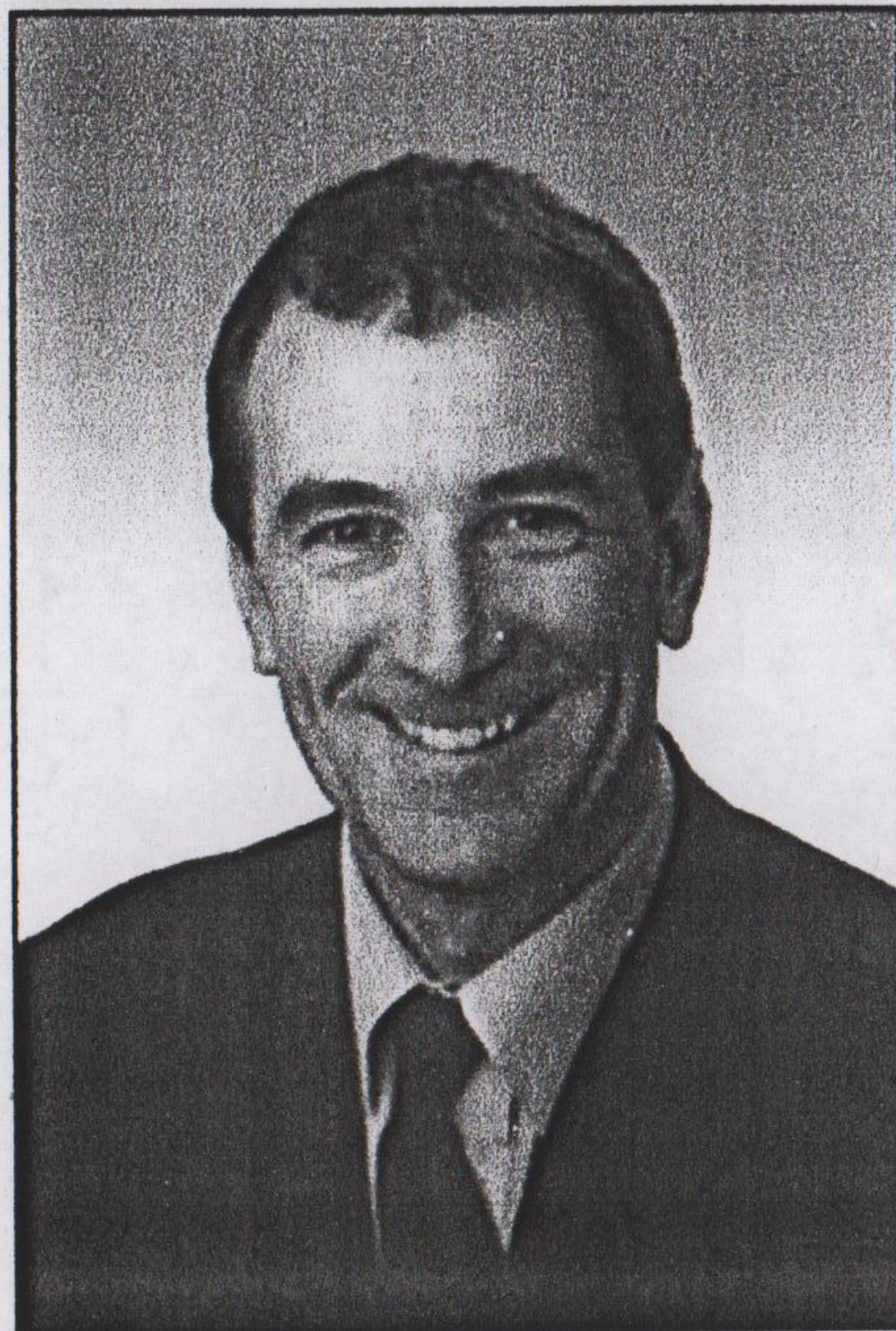
Milan Rai, who will be speaking at NSPM's Peace Conference on 26th Feb 2006, was sentenced to time in prison at the end of last year, for refusing to pay a fine arising from a JNV action against the invasion of Fallujah in October 2004. Milan made the most of his time at HMP Lewes by writing extensive prison diaries detailing his insights into political activism and his experiences of prison life. These are published in full on JNV's site (www.j-n-v.org/Mil_Prison_Diary.htm). The selection below concerns Milan's response to a letter received whilst in prison, from Dan Robertson, a Nottingham



IN FOCUS: PEACE CONFERENCE

On the London Bombings

Alan Simpson MP



keynote speakers at this year's Peace Conference.

Please visit his site:
www.alansimpsonmp.co.uk
for more info.

There is a stillness between the flash of an explosion and the moment the blast hits you. On the morning of 7th July 2005, this stillness filled London with surreal movements of normality in a far from normal situation.

Those nowhere near any of the blasts knew that something had happened. Tube stations were suddenly closed. Buses passed without stopping, their seats completely empty. The sound of emergency vehicle sirens told you they were needed elsewhere.

The surreal character of the moment was that human streams of displaced travellers steadily continued to make their own

journeys into Central London; a refusal by civil society to allow terrorism to defeat it.

Acts of terrorism are always cowardly. They are military attacks on the innocent, drawing no distinction between young and old, black and white, Muslim, Jew, and Christian. Such arbitrary and gratuitous bombing is no more acceptable in London than in Baghdad, Fallujah or Mosul. This is what we have to reflect on in the days to come.

The most immediate temptation to resist is that of the knee-jerk reaction. There is no case for the rushing through of emergency anti-terrorist laws, or of draconian restrictions on our liberties.

The best way to defend the open society is to live in open, democratic ways. We defeat fundamentalist hatreds by demonstrating our solidarity with those of different faiths. We best confront al Qaeda by refusing to become like them. But some messages cannot be ignored.

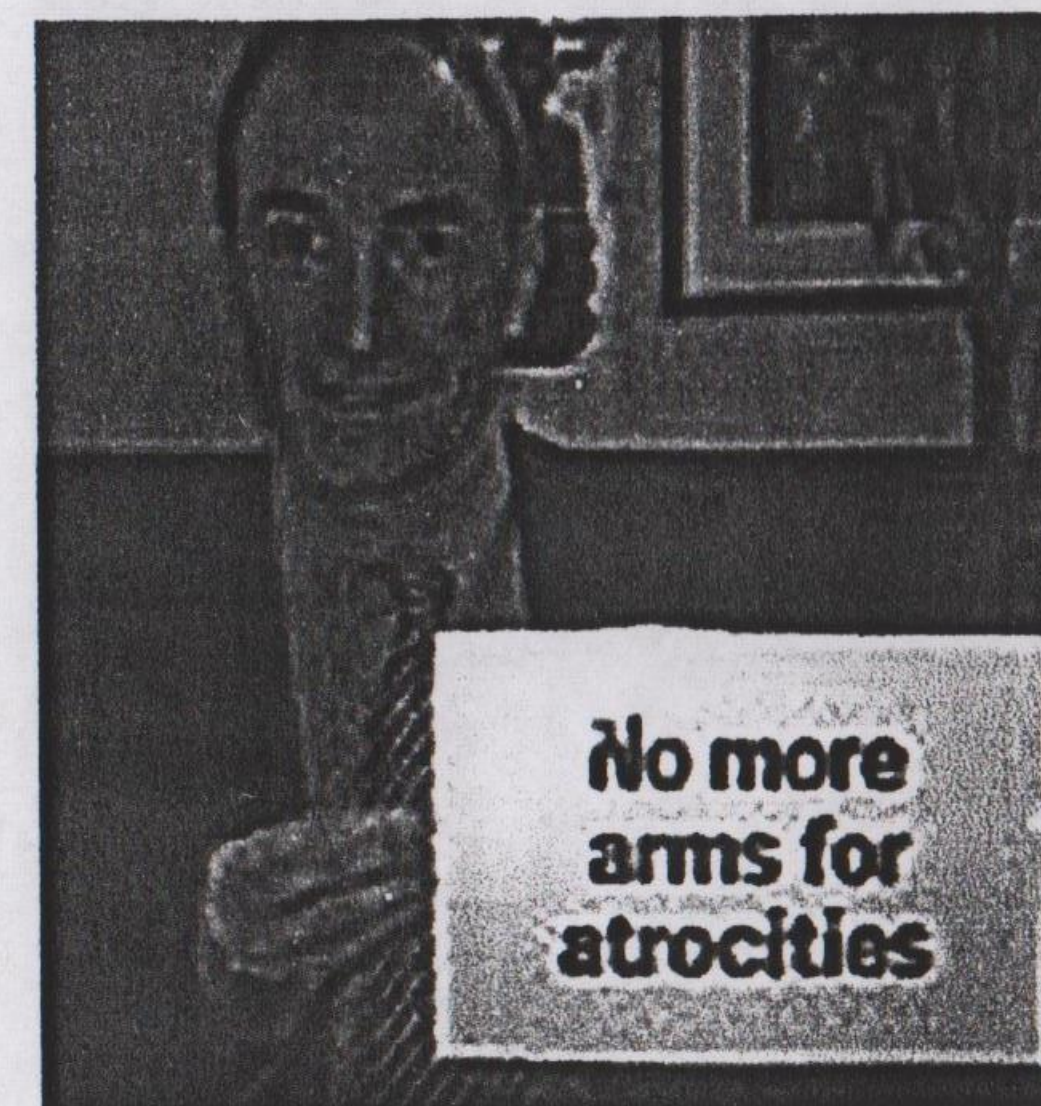
The anti-war movement consistently warned that the illegal war on Iraq would increase the terrorist threat to Britain rather than reduce it. We said too, that Britain's continued military occupation of Iraq, and the arbitrary violence to Iraqi cities resisting the occupation, would soon find echoes within Britain.

Once, Iraq was a no-go zone for Al-Qaeda. Now it is their recruiting ground. Britain cannot insist on a determination to maintain the Bush administration's occupation of Iraq without making Britain part of the war zone.

When the current UN mandate expires at the end of the year, British troops must leave. The government cannot credibly claim a right to pursue this ongoing war in Iraq without recognising that its

opponents will bring the same war onto British soil.

There will be voices who argue that these bombings make the case for compulsory ID cards and general police stop-and-search powers. The answer is the complete opposite. We have to assert our belief in freedoms by refusing to close them down.

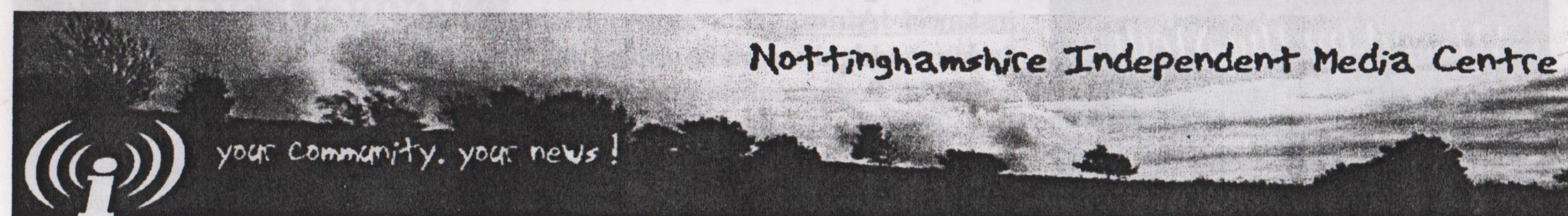


Londoners may have felt that such bombings were bound to happen sooner rather than later. Most know they are inextricably bound up in the open wound of Iraq. As we raise our voices in outrage against the brutality the bombing brings with it, we should reflect on how close this brings us to families (just like our own) who face the same horrors in Iraq. The official war in Iraq has ended. The bombings have not. In looking for answers to the threat to citizens in the UK, we cannot pretend that Britain's continuing role in Iraq is not a central part of the problem.

After the Madrid bombings the same issue confronted the Spanish people. They chose to tackle the issue of the war, rather than to extend the boundaries of the battlefield. Britain has to find the courage to do the same.

IN FOCUS: PEACE CONFERENCE

Nottinghamshire IMC Mission Statement



The Peace Movement is pleased and proud to have Indymedia as part of its Peace Conference Program. Indymedia will be part of the panel hosting the Second Session titled "Overcoming Media Bias". The following is Nottinghamshire IMC mission statement.

Their website is:
www.indymedia.org.uk/en/region/s/nottinghamshire

The Nottinghamshire Independent Media Centre (IMC) is a collective of independent community groups and individuals committed to offering grassroots and local non-corporate news coverage. It is a democratic media outlet for the creation of radical, accurate and passionate tellings of truth.

We aim to generate a fresh perspective on mainstream media-twisted stories and give a voice to individuals and communities throughout Nottinghamshire that are marginalised and have no say in the mainstream media.

By connecting individuals and campaign groups together, we can disseminate information and raise awareness of local community concerns, campaigns and activities as well as issues of national and global relevance.

Nottinghamshire Indymedia is an open-publishing website which will allow everyone to contribute regardless of their locality, ethnicity or gender.

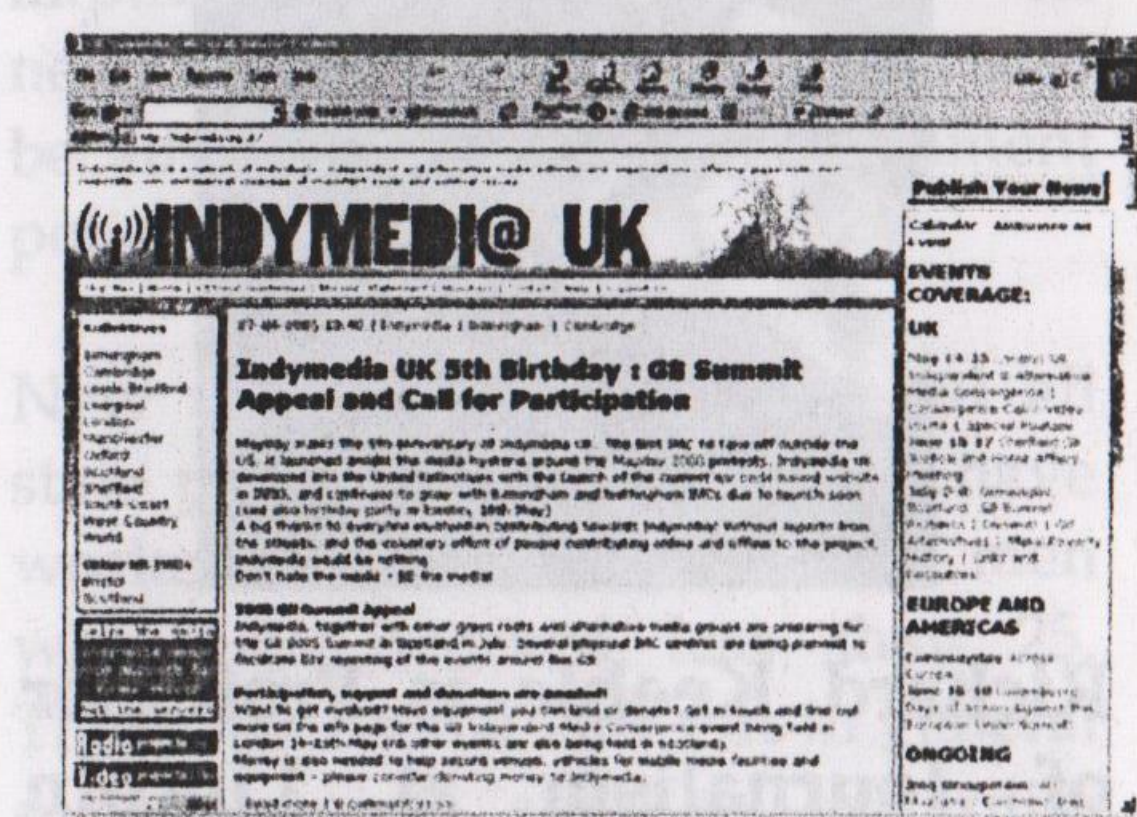
It will strive to empower communities through skill sharing and training to become part of the Nottinghamshire IMC project, and work together towards maintaining a diverse and honest representation of what is really happening in our communities. Unlike the corporate media, Nottinghamshire IMC is run through an open democratic process.

Central to the Nottinghamshire IMC is the Nottinghamshire Indymedia website, which as a platform generates a variety of other activities including a community radio project, training sessions and workshops, video-productions, info nights, film-screenings and a regularly print out of the generated news.

As a collective we aim to pursue the following principles:

- To maintain an open democratic structure where everyone can contribute equally to decision-making.
- To reject all systems of domination and discrimination.
- To reject all ties with political parties and corporate bodies.
- To acknowledge that the struggle for a better world takes many forms.
- To focus on local issues and grassroots campaigns.
- To continually welcome and provide training and support to new volunteers, groups and contributors wanting to become involved with the Nottinghamshire IMC collective.

Nottinghamshire Indymedia



Should I believe news I read on Indymedia?

Should you believe news you read on the BBC or CNN.com? All reporters have their own biases: governments and massive for-profit corporations that own media entities have their own biases as well, and often impose their views on their reporters (or their reporters self-censor to conform their own biases to those of their employer).

You should look at all reports you read on the Indymedia site with a critical eye, just as you should look at all media before you in a discerning and critical manner.

Don't hate the media,
be the media

<http://nottinghamshire.indymedia.org.uk>

Nottinghamshire IMC works as part of the global Indymedia Network. The network works to foster media creation based upon the principles of free participation and association, mutual aid, open-source software, open publishing, and transparent decision-making.

As an affiliate of the Indymedia network, the Nottinghamshire collective remains committed to these principles.

Think globally
Act locally!

IN FOCUS: PEACE CONFERENCE

CHAD'S GENOCIDE: *Missed by the Media*

By Pr Richard Keeble



Richard Keeble is Professor of Journalism at Lincoln University. His publications include *Secret State, Silent Press* (John Libbey; 1997), a study of the US/UK press coverage of the 1991 Gulf conflict.

He will be a keynote speaker at this year's Peace Conference and will be part of the Second Session panel on "Overcoming Media Bias".

This excerpt is taken from his blog on the Media Lens website:

http://medialens.org/weblog/richard_keeble.php.

According to the editors "Media Lens is our response to the unwillingness, or inability, of the mainstream media to tell the truth about the real causes and extent of many of the problems facing us, such as human rights abuses, poverty, pollution and climate change."

Masses of information from the media constantly bombard us yet, paradoxically, often the most important goes uncovered. Take for instance, Africa. A country like Sudan suddenly comes under the spotlight. Reports of rape, massacre and corruption in the Darfur region reinforce all the stereotypes about the "dark continent" of savage aliens. And then, just as quickly, Sudan will fall from view.

However, while thousands of refugees from the Darfur conflict have fled to Chad, just to the west of Sudan, this country remains largely off the British and American media map. And so one of the most remarkable contemporary human rights campaigns goes largely unreported in the UK as the Belgium courts seek to try the former Chadian dictator Hissène Habré for crimes of genocide during his rule from 1982 to 1990 – even in the face of the Belgium Parliament's decision to repeal its landmark "universal human rights jurisdiction" statute.

Following threats from the United States in June 2003 that Belgium risked losing its status as host to NATO's headquarters, the 1993 historic law, which allowed victims to file complaints in Belgium for atrocities committed abroad, was repealed. Yet a new law, adopted in August 2003, allowed for the continuation of the case against Habré – much to the delight of human rights campaigners.

And finally last month, Senegal, where Habré has been under house arrest, arrested the former dictator to face an extradition request from Belgium over the genocide charges.

Formerly part of French Equatorial Africa, Chad gained its independence in 1960 and since then has been gripped by civil war. In a rare instance of coverage on 21 May 1992, the London-based Guardian

carried four short paragraphs reporting how 40,000 people were estimated to have died in detention or been executed during the tyranny of Habré. A justice ministry report concluded that Habré had committed genocide against the Chadian people.

Five years ago, in a case inspired by the one against Chile's General Augusto Pinochet, several human rights organisations, led by Human Rights Watch, filed a suit against Habré in Senegal (his refuge since 1990). They argued that he could be tried anywhere for crimes against humanity and that former heads of state were not immune. However, on 21 March 2001, the Senegal Court of Cassation threw out the case. And so, human rights campaigners turned their attention to Belgium where one of the victims of Habré's torture now lives.

Extraordinary events, but all of them hidden behind a virtual wall of silence in the West. Yet also hidden is the massive, secret war waged by the United States and Britain from bases in Chad against Libya. British involvement in a 1996 plot to assassinate the Libyan leader, Colonel Mu'ammar Gaddafi, as alleged by the maverick M15 officer David Shayler, was reported as an isolated event. Yet it is best seen as part of a wide-ranging and long-standing strategy of the US and UK secret states to remove Gaddafi.

Grabbing power by ousting King Idris in a 1969 coup, Gaddafi (who, intriguingly, had followed a military training course in England in 1966) soon became the target of covert operations by the French, Americans, Israelis and British.

Stephen Dorril, in his seminal history of M16, records how in 1971 a British plan to invade the country, release political prisoners and restore the monarchy ended in an embarrassing flop.

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Nine years later, the head of the French secret service, Alain de Gaigneron de Marolles, resigned after a French-led plan ended in disaster when a rebellion by Libyan troops in Tobruk was quickly suppressed.

Then, in 1982, away from the glare of the media, Habré, with the backing of the CIA and French troops, overthrew the Chadian government of Goukouni Wedeye. Bob Woodward (of Watergate fame), in his semi-official history of the CIA, reveals that the Chad covert operation was the first undertaken by the new CIA chief William Casey and that, throughout the decade, Libya ranked as high as the Soviet Union as the *bête noir* of the White House.

A report from Amnesty International, *Chad: The Habré Legacy*, records massive military and financial support for the dictator by the US Congress. It adds: "None of the documents presented to Congress and consulted by AI covering the period 1984 to 1989 make any reference to human rights violations."

US official records indicate that funds for the Chad-based covert war against Libya also came from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Israel and Iraq.

The Saudis, for instance, gave \$7million to an opposition group, the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (also backed by French intelligence and the CIA).

However, a plan to assassinate Gaddafi and seize power on 8 May 1984 was crushed. In the following year, the US asked Egypt to invade Libya and overthrow Gaddafi but President Mubarak refused.

By the end of 1985, the Washington Post had exposed the plan after congressional leaders opposing it wrote in protest to President Reagan.

Frustrated in its covert attempts to topple Gaddafi, the US government's strategy suddenly shifted. For 11 minutes in the early morning of 14 April 1986, 30 US air force and navy bombers struck Tripoli and Benghazi in a raid code-named El Dorado Canyon.

The US/UK mainstream media were ecstatic. Yet the main purpose of the raid was to kill the Libyan president – dubbed a "mad dog" by Reagan. In the event, the first bomb to drop on Tripoli hit Gaddafi's home killing Hana, his adopted daughter aged 15 months – while his eight other children and wife Safiya were all hospitalised, some with serious injuries. The president escaped.

Reports of US military action against Libya disappeared from the media after the 1986 assault. But away from the glare of publicity, the CIA launched its most extensive effort yet to spark an anti-Gaddafi coup.

A secret army was recruited from among the many Libyans captured in border battles with Chad during the 1980s. And as concerns grew in M16 that Gaddafi was aiming to develop chemical weapons, Britain funded various opposition groups in Libya.

Then in 1990, with the crisis in the Gulf developing, French troops helped oust Habré in a secret operation and install Idriss Déby as the new President of Chad. The French government had tired of Habré's genocidal policies while George Bush senior's administration decided not to frustrate France in exchange for co-operation in its attack on Iraq.

Yet, even under Déby, abuses of civil rights by government forces have continued.

Recently, relations between the US, UK and Libya have thawed, with Gaddafi pledging support for the "war against terrorism" and agreeing to pay compensation to the victims of the 1988 Flight 103 Lockerbie bombing, for which a Libyan intelligence agent was jailed.

But significantly, at his trial in November 2003, David Shayler was denied the right (under the European Convention of Human Rights) to speak out about the 1996 anti-Gaddafi plot.

Since it is obvious there are a lot of shady secrets from the years of the dirty war to conceal, such a decision by the court must have come as a relief to the government.

And a report in the Guardian of 15 March 2004 said US troops were arriving in several African countries, including Chad, as the Pentagon warned that the region ran the risk of becoming an al-Qaeda recruiting ground. Giles Tremlett reported ("US sends special forces into North Africa"): "...US navy P-3 Orion aircraft guided Chad troops during a two-day battle on the border with Niger last week in which 43 suspected members of Algeria's Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat were killed." Oil reserves in North and West Africa are drawing increasing attention from the US.

West Africa supplies the US with 15 per cent of its oil while the US National Intelligence Council has projected the figure will grow to 25 per cent by 2015.

OPINION

UP IN ARMS AGAINST ARMS

Jude Brady

In 1997 when Tony Blair assumed office, an ethically minded and internationally responsible government was promised.

The late Robin Cook pledged a determination to 'put human rights at the heart of our foreign policy' (The Guardian, 13 May 1997).

Seven and a half years later, the world is still waiting.

The UK's repertoire of atrocities is rapidly accumulating, with Great Britain now being the world's second biggest arms exporter. The UK's failure to revise flawed regulations and close legal loopholes in the armament laws has allowed for the proliferation of weapon sales to oppressive regimes and impoverished countries.

The British government continues to evade responsibility for the proper direction of the arms industry despite numerous agreements and asseverations not to supply armaments to nations where the weapons may be used for internal aggression or as implements of torture.

The guidelines and regulations laid out in documents such as the 1998 EU Code of Conduct, the 2002 Wassenaar Arrangement Best Practical Guideline for Small Arms and Light Weapons and the 2002 OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons have been repeatedly violated. UK and USA arms companies accounted for 90% of the totality of weapons imported by the Indonesian government during the East Timor crisis.

These weapons were those used to sustain war on two fronts and to aid the genocide in East Timor.

A third of the population of East Timor died at the hands of the Indonesian military using British and American produced arms.

At present no licence is required for arms deals that are conducted off British shores. Providing the armaments never touch British soil, British based companies are enabled to totally evade national and European laws and this effectively allows the transfer of arms to anywhere in the world. The effects of such inadequate regulations have proved catastrophic to the developing world.

A 2002 estimate showed the developing world to account for 66.7% of worldwide arms imports (Control Arms Campaign, Guns or Growth? June 2004). The Western world proved liable for over 90% of these exports (ibid). The emergence of arms races between neighbouring countries is one of the consequences of such an unrestricted trade. The economic and social repercussions of an armaments race in a developing country can be devastating.

The problem is simple; increased military spending will invariably lead to a reduction in public spending. Food, healthcare and educational provisions inevitably suffer when guns are privileged over people. These problems then require the aid of the international community. In 2004 the UK exported an estimated \$1.9 billion worth of armaments. In the same year the British government supplied \$7.836 million in foreign aid. The absurdity of the arms industry becomes apparent with the consideration that the very countries that export the weapons that lead to arms races, then donate money back to the developing world to counter the effects of the poverty caused by the arms races. The continuation of the arms trade works to consistently undermine the aid efforts of the international community as well as anti-poverty organisations such as Oxfam.

The close ties between the government and the arms industry account for Blair's reluctance to review arms trading laws. A policy of mutual benefit exists between the two bodies. The February 2005 Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) report revealed annual government subsidies of up to £990 million being supplied to British arms companies. In exchange for heavy subsidisation and ineffectual trading laws, the armament giants such as BAE systems act as advisory bodies to the Ministry of Defence.

The CAAT report also exposes the disconcerting number of Labour Peers, such as Lord Clive Hollick, the former director of BAE Systems and Lord Simpson of Dunkeld, former Deputy Chief Executive of British Aerospace, who are or who have been directly related to armament production companies.

The elision of the boundaries between government and industry must be tackled if the UK is to see the establishment of a more ethical and morally responsible arms policy. A tracking system, tracing weapons from production to the country of final destination would go some way to achieving this. The installation of such a system would potentially prevent the sale of arms to undemocratic regimes or countries that are susceptible to the risk of arms races. The 'Control Arms' Guns or Growth? Report (2004) proposes a methodology that should be utilised by arms exporters to assess any potential negative impact the arms deal may precipitate in the recipient country. Even with the implementation of such strategies there remains a need for greater government accountability and transparency.

With the government under continued pressure from NGOs and the general public to provide these reforms, the future promises a transformation in arms policy; a policy that champions people and not guns.

OPINION

Female Genital Mutilation

Catherine Taylor

On December 6th 2005 a four year old Sudanese girl, Enaam Abdelwahab, lost her life after undergoing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). A doctor at Khartoum Bahari Hospital, to which Enaam was submitted, reported that she died due to excessive bleeding and blood poisoning after being submitted to this cruel tradition. Sadly, this is not uncommon for girls undergoing FGM.

FGM comprises all procedures which involve partial or total removal of the female genitalia or other injury to female genital organs for non-therapeutic reasons.

There are three main types of FGM:

(i) clitoridectomy involves the removal of the whole clitoris, and constitutes around 80% of all cases of FGM.

(ii) pharaonic circumcision consists of clitoridectomy, as well as the removal of the labia minora and majora and the stitching up of vulva and the vaginal opening (infibulation), and constitutes around 15% of FGM cases.

(iii) sunna circumcision involves only the removal of the tip or hood of the clitoris. The sunna method is the least severe, though the intricacy of the operation means there is often further damage to the girl's genitalia.

FGM is usually carried out by unqualified people, primarily women. Objects used may include scissors, razor blades, even tin lids and broken glass. Sterilization of these items is rare. FGM can result in infection, haemorrhaging, cysts and neuromas, sexual dysfunction (including severe pain during

intercourse), complications in pregnancy and child birth, difficulties in menstruation, and an increased risk of vesico-vaginal fistula or recto-vaginal fistula (causing incontinence). Then there is, of course, the psychological damage caused by FGM.

I'm not telling you this just to disturb the squeamish among you, but because every day nearly 6,000 girls worldwide undergo FGM (Source: World Health Org), and because something needs to be done about this. FGM does not just occur in isolated African tribes, as many people assume, but is widespread in

"I was genitally-mutilated with a blunt penknife. (...) The pain was terrible and unbearable. (...) I was not given any anaesthetic in the operation to reduce my pain, nor any antibiotics to fight against infection. Afterwards, I haemorrhaged and became anaemic. This was attributed to witchcraft. I suffered for a long time from acute vaginal infections."
Hannah Koroma, Sierra Leone

many African countries. It is estimated that 98% of women in Somalia have undergone the procedure; 97% in Egypt; 90% in Ethiopia; 94% in Mali (Amnesty International), to name but a few.

FGM is most common in Africa, but also occurs in the Middle East and Asia, as well as among some immigrant communities in Europe, Australasia and North America. In the UK, despite the outlawing of FGM over 20 years ago, an estimated 25,000 girls under the age of 16 are currently at risk (FORWARD).

There are a number of justifications - generally based on false assumptions - for FGM. These include the belief that it can help

prevent extra-marital sex and lesbianism by removing sexual desire in women; the belief that a woman is unclean if she has not been 'cut'; that a woman cannot conceive unless she has undergone FGM; even that the procedure makes a woman's face more beautiful.

Although Islam is often (inaccurately) invoked to support the use of FGM, the practice is based, not so much in religion - FGM is prevalent in many non-Muslim African communities - but, rather, in cultural traditions.

While a certain degree of sensitivity to the unique cultures of non-Western countries is important, we cannot let a fear of cultural imperialism cloud our judgement when it comes to the violation of a person's human rights.

Please help stop girls like Enaam and Hannah undergoing this horrific operation: by signing a petition to the Sudanese government (before 8th March) asking them to make FGM illegal in their country. (see www.forwarduk.org.uk); and by supporting programs that seek to help bring an end to FGM by promoting alternative rites of passage and by educating people about the health issues (again, see www.forwarduk.org.uk).

A number of exciting events are being planned for the last week of term to raise awareness about FGM and to fundraise for the women's health charity FORWARD. Watch out for posters! To get involved e-mail apyxct@nottingham.ac.uk

Catherine Taylor is President of the Humanist Society, Nottingham University

WORLD BRIEFING

UZBEKISTAN: The Lost World

Khalid Shroufi

Uzbekistan: part of the lost world between Europe, the Middle East and Asia. In the eyes of the Western media the region has no significance; it is just a neighbour to Afghanistan, or a state occupied by the Soviet Union. But in May 2005 Uzbek troops fired at a group of protesters killing anywhere between 400 to 1,000 un-armed people and for once, the media had to pay attention.

Uzbekistan lies in between the four other Central Asian "Stans": Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and with a population of 26 million is the biggest of the five. Uzbekistan has an 88% Muslim population, and in theory 80 of the population are native Uzbek, although independent

sources claim that 40 % of the population are Tajiks forced to register as Uzbeks by the Soviet Union.

The five states were controlled by Russia from before the First World War and only gained independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Islam Karimov, the ex-communist ruler subsequently won 88% of the vote in first post-soviet election, and has won re-elections in 1995 and 2005, although all three have fallen short of international standards. Since independence, 2 million Russians have emigrated and Uzbekistan has tried for closer ties with the US. After the world trade centre attacks Uzbekistan joined the "war on terror" and allowed the US to use its air bases in the South of the country to attack Afghanistan. Islam Karimov used the "war on terror" as a guise to attack civil liberties and repeatedly made arrests based on charges of Islamic terrorism. However when 23 businessmen

were suspiciously arrested a group of 4,000 protesters first protested, and then armed men later stormed the prison releasing the 23 businessmen and 4,000 prisoners. The next day the protests continued. The interior ministry sealed off the city of Andijon and fought with armed men, but it also used AK-47s and armoured personnel carriers to kill between 400 and 1,000 un-armed protesters. Human Rights Watch said the killing was so extensive that it could be classed as a massacre.

After the massacre there was some condemnation by Western states, which is one reason why the US have been asked to leave Uzbek air bases in the South, and why Uzbekistan is seeking closer ties with Russia. So that is a brief glimpse of Uzbekistan, interestingly it also has a literacy rate above 95%, a legacy of the Soviet Union, and 34% of its population is below 14.

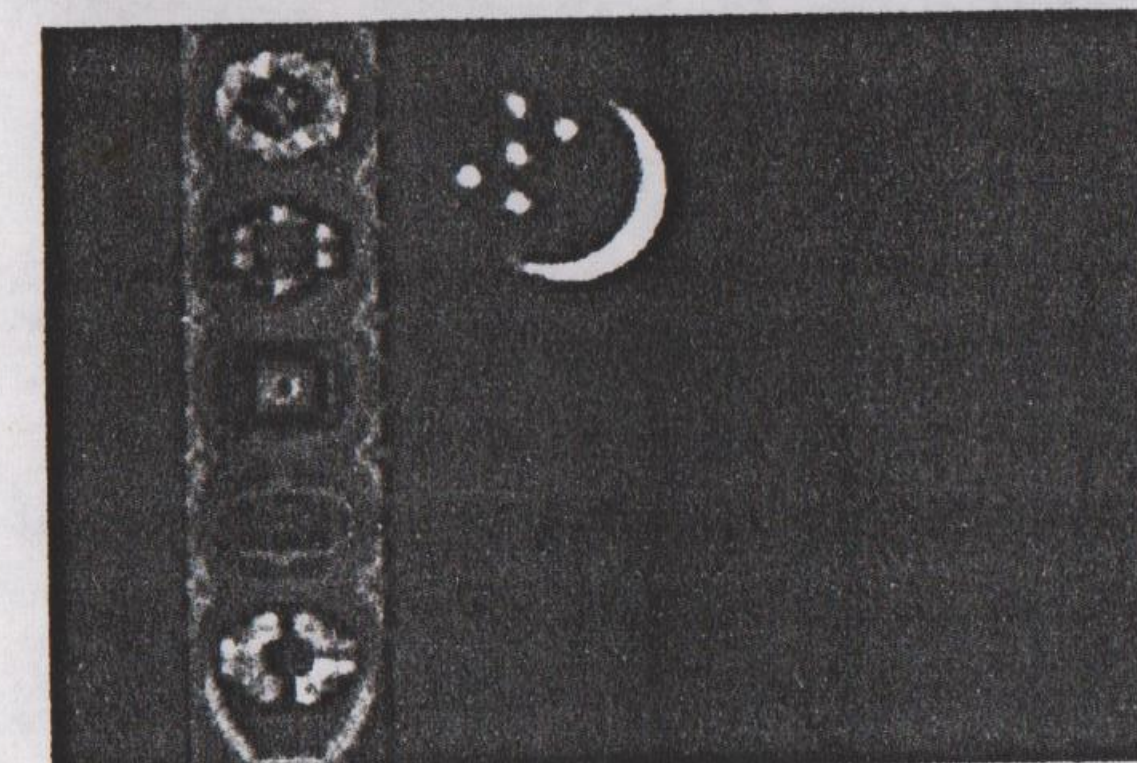
Who knows what its future holds?



WORLD BRIEFING

TURKMENISTAN A Comic Tragedy

Khalid Shroufi



Turkmenistan: lying in between Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, it is the smallest of the former Soviet republics in Central Asia with just five million people.

Turkmenistan has often been the place of comic tragedy and repression but recent changes in the law have added pensioner poverty to its list of problems.

Turkmenistan was one of the 15 republics of the Soviet Union declared in 1924 and it remained so until the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991.

However independence did not lead to democracy; Saparmurat Niyazov the leader of the ruling communist party from 1985, remained in power with his newly established Democratic Party.

Turkmenistan is reportedly less brutal than neighbouring Uzbekistan but is still of particular concern to human rights organizations, and it is especially repressive in relation to religious freedoms.

President Niyazov is obsessed with his own cult of personality- he has declared himself president for life, introducing various laws based around him and his family.

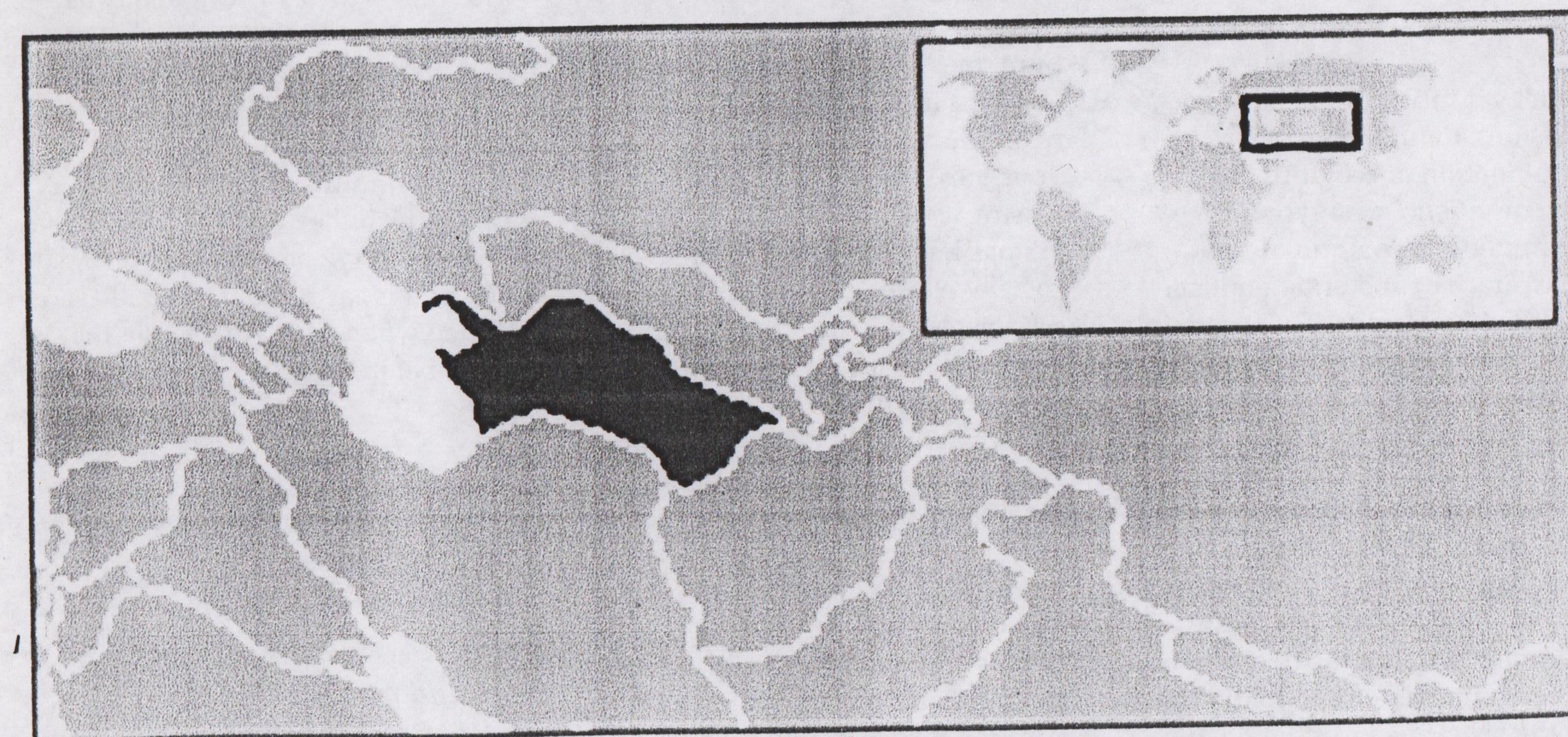
The two books he has written are mandatory in schools and his face is on all watches, banknotes and bottles of vodka. The days of the week have been re-named after him and his family members, and the month of April and bread have been re-named after his mother. His height, at five feet, is a particular issue. In Ashgabat a 15-meter tall gold-plated statue stands on a rotating pedestal, so it will always face into the sun and shine light

onto the capital city.

Media bans exist on reporting anything negative about the president or his family. In 2005 Reporters Without Borders labelled Turkmenistan the third worst place in the world for media freedom. Despite having large reserves of natural gas and petroleum, the people of Turkmenistan are impoverished as it relies on neighbours to transport its gas, and because of ineffective government policies.

New pension policies have cut all state pensions to women who have worked less than 20 years and men who have worked less than 25. There has been a 20% cut in general social services such as maternity pay.

The people of Turkmenistan face an un-certain future, the president has said that elections will take place in 2009, but that he will review this decision at the time. With massive reserves of natural gas, the economies of the world are also likely to shape Turkmenistan around there own goals



COMMENT: MIDDLE EAST

An entirely uncontroversial appraisal of the Palestinian Elections

Richard Hindes

A comparison of elite reactions to the electoral successes of Islamic fundamentalists in elections in Iraq and Palestine is telling. In Iraq the recent election, which saw the vote for Shia Islamists dwarf that achieved by their secular counterparts, was heralded as a testament to Bush and Blair's selfless crusade for human rights and freedom. In Palestine the emergence of Hamas, not only as a major player in Palestinian electoral politics, but as the dominant force has been greeted by an onslaught of opprobrium.

This contrast highlights the fact that our leaders' supposed opposition to Islamic fundamentalism has less to do with their ostensible concern for women's rights and homophobia than it does with the interests of western imperialism. While the election in Iraq is their latest effort to salvage the occupation which they are desperate to see succeed, Hamas' victory represents a serious challenge to imperialism's designs for the Middle East.

Don't get me wrong. I have no illusions about the vicious combination of religious obscurantism, misogyny, homophobia, communalism, conspiracism and anti-Semitism peddled by Hamas. There certainly not the sort of people I'd want to be trapped in a lift with, but this election wasn't about what I wanted anymore than it was about what George Bush Ariel Sharon wanted.

The bases of Hamas' success are several-fold. Firstly and most obviously there is the question of the ongoing Israeli occupation, with all the brutality, humiliation and

discomforts that entails. While the Palestinian Authority (PA) has moved away from armed struggle in preference for negotiation, Hamas has continued its military campaign, with numerous successful "martyrdom operations" to show for it.

No doubt, amongst Palestinians who wish to strike back against Israel for the killing/detention/torture of their husband/wife/son/brother that counts for a lot.

There is also the thorny question of corruption amongst the PA. Fatah has dominated Palestinian politics for longer than most Palestinians probably care to remember. Those who have risen through the ranks of the party haven't generally done so badly out of the deal, carving out their own fiefdoms and siphoning off money into foreign accounts. Hamas by contrast is made up of deeply committed religious believers.

Sure, they may be crazy, but the constant fear that Allah is looking over your shoulder will keep you on your toes. While the PA has been pissing away money for years, Hamas has built up an extensive social welfare network providing schools, hospitals and mosques. Again, much of this may come wrapped up in propagandist paper, but when nobody else is providing these sorts of things it isn't going to harm your popularity.

It remains to be seen how the influence of power will affect Hamas. Hitherto they've avoided getting their hands dirty in its murky pools, with only a few

municipalities to their name. From now on, however, they can - and no doubt will - be held responsible for what happens throughout Palestine and, more to the point, for everything which goes wrong. Furthermore, the pressures towards compromise which accompany the move from the radical fringes to the mainstream, and the effect this can have on support should not be underestimated.

My guess is that sooner or later Israel and Hamas will get around a table for a chat. It'd be better for all concerned that this happened sooner rather than later, but only time will tell.

For what it's worth I think the role of those of us fighting the good fight in the west is straight-forward: (1) Continue to oppose the Israeli occupation, the expansion of settlements and the construction of the "security wall".

These things are as wrong today as they have ever been; (2) do what we can to support progressive elements amongst the Palestinians such as trade unionists and feminists who may well find the political space within which they operate contract over the coming months and years. None of this carries any guarantees, but then when have we ever let that stop us before?

Richard is a former President of NSPM and regular contributor to Ceasefire. More of his ill-considered rants can be found at his blog: disillusionedkid.blogspot.com

CURRENT AFFAIRS

SANCTIONS AND STARVATION

Khalid Shroufi

Since 1939 more people have died from sanctions, than the WMD they are allegedly trying to contain. In Iraq alone, any where up from 500,000 people died from sanctions, disproportionately children as they where most affected.

During the first Gulf War the UN passed resolution 661, on the surface this had good goals; to take Iraq out of Kuwait, and to make sure Saddam Hussein couldn't develop WMD.

But in the years to follow the effects where devastating, first of all the effect of economic sanctions reduced the amount of Iraqi imports to just \$100 per person, a vast drop compared to the wealth the Iraqi's where used to. Items such as chlorine, essential to disinfecting water, where banned because they where deemed "dual use", which meant they could be used as weapons.

But these where the sort of things that killed thousands of Iraqi's, and possibly helped Saddam Hussein to remain in power.

The Oil for food programme was introduced in 1997 which helped slightly, but the people dying from malnutrition and disease continued until 2003 when sanctions where lifted.

The lesson to learn is that total sanctions must be used with extreme caution, they target the weak and vulnerable not the ruler.

IMMIGRATION AND THE BRAIN DRAIN

Khalid Shroufi

There are reactionary concerns in British society that immigration in all its forms will "flood" the country, take the jobs of the white people or cause civil un-rest.

These concerns can be dismissed with reasoned arguments such as the surplus for more employment in the UK. However one argument used to support immigration is that it helps fill key positions such as doctors and nurses in the UK.

But where do these people come from?

My own father was a doctor who came to the UK from Iraq. Large numbers of other doctors and nurses are coming from countries such as India and S. Africa, but behind them they leave health systems much less advanced than the British one, with much greater shortages of key workers. In a sense, the most precious resources some third world countries have.

The NHS has agreed to stop actively recruiting doctors and nurses in these circumstances, but others will still follow by there own means.

Now, the issue is not to limit people's freedom of movement and multicultural bonding, but to recognise the grave cost inflicted on developing countries, and to counter the belief that immigrants drain Britain's resources, when the exact opposite is occurring.

COMMENT: BLASPHEMY

Do we have the right to blaspheme?

Catherine Taylor

The question that should have been put to rest decades ago has been reignited with the reaction from many Muslims to 12 cartoons printed in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten and subsequently in a number of other European newspapers.

The cartoons - which depict, among other things, the prophet Muhammad wearing a turban that conceals a bomb - have been met with furious criticism. The boycott of Danish goods by many Muslim countries has been extremely effective, resulting in Danish businesses laying off hundreds of workers. The Saudi Arabian ambassador to Denmark has been recalled. The Danish government has advised its citizens not to travel in the Middle East and has withdrawn its aid workers from Gaza. There have even been a number of bomb scares in Denmark itself.

All over some silly cartoons.

I mean, surely Islam - the second largest and fastest growing religion in the world - isn't going to be toppled by an - admittedly poor - little joke. But maybe I'm missing the point. The point being: it is offensive to Muslims.

But so what? I'm offended when theists tell me I'm going to hell for my lack of faith, but I wouldn't want their views to be censored.

They have the right to say what they want; I do not have the right to protection against being offended.

Is there a difference between the offence caused to me as mentioned above, and that caused by blasphemy? Insulting or ridiculing, say, Karl Marx might offend a Marxist, just as doing the same to God can cause offence to a religious person.

There is, it may be contended, a clear difference between these two examples, though: God is sacred; Marx is not. However, this simply raises questions over the meaning and significance of 'sacred'.

Sacred is defined as something or someone that has been 'made or declared holy'. Its meaning is contingent; it means something different in Saudi Arabia than it does in France.

The 'sacred' has no special place in secular society. That is, it has no special protection from ridicule, just as the non-sacred does not. To treat the two differently would be discrimination.

To give the sacred special protection would imply that religious beliefs are more important or meaningful than non-religious beliefs. I do not believe in God, but I do believe -

often passionately - in many other things: peace; freedom; community; science; art; veganism; the Back to the Future trilogy.

I'm sure many Danes believe in their country and were offended by the burning of their national flag. But if we prevent people burning flags or drawing pictures we risk sliding down the slippery slope towards authoritarianism.

This is why the sacking of the editor of France Soir - the French paper which reprinted the cartoons along with the headline 'yes, we have a right to caricature God' - is so unnerving. It is far easier to slide down the slope than it is to climb back up it.

People have died for our right to free speech. This freedom has allowed great progress in science and the arts. Admittedly, the offending cartoons are hardly the Satanic Verses, but if we allow freedom of speech to be eroded on this occasion it will become easier for other works to be censored in the same way in the future.

Freedom of speech is an essential part of our society. This freedom must, for the sake of fairness, include freedom to blaspheme.

Catherine Taylor is President of the Nottingham university Humanist Society

REVIEWS: MUSIC

Takk
Sigur Ros

Hich Yezza

Iceland has a proud tradition when it comes to producing quite remarkable musical talent. Of course if Icelandic music was a movement "Original bordering on the Insane" would be its motto because insanity (in the best sense of the word) and originality are the twin key concepts you'll need to keep in mind when sampling the delightful output of this mysterious intriguing land.



Naturally, we have to say something about Bjork: that most obsessive-obsessing of songbirds, whose debut album regularly features in the all-time-favourite lists that litter pop and rock magazines week in week out, and it seems almost impossible to understand Sigur Ros without going through the Bjork induction course, that's not to say the music of the former is a derivative attempt at emulating that of the latter, nothing could be further from the truth, there are parallels and crossed paths but the same could be said for the Beatles/Pink Floyd or Leonard Cohen/Bob Dylan and no one has ever accused any of these of being a copycat (actually someone has but that's another story altogether and,



of course, I'll be telling you all about it in the next issue of this magazine).

Sigur Ros's new album Takk is quite the creature: When you hold the CD case in your hands it feels (to me anyways) like you're holding something alive, something that has intent: something that has soul. When you actually put it on and close your eyes something within your very core is hit hard, and fast. These are not songs, not in the normal sense of beginnings and ends and choruses and bridges and so on. No, this is quite a different sort of beast: the tracks are stand-alone worlds that you can almost swim right through. For instance the not-quite-anthem-but-getting-there euphoria of "Hoppippola" forms a brilliant answer to the quasi-hypnotic chanting of "Saeglopur". The best track for me is the optimistic sound-feast of "Neo Blodnasir" very narrowly ahead of the more radio-friendly "Glosoli".

"Gong" is one of the few curiosities on this album (curiosity being a very relative term in this context), it doesn't seem to know whether it's a grand symphony or an attempt at mature Peter Gabriel pop but it's an interesting piece all the same.

The high-pitched exhortations of Jónsi, the fantastically-exuberant lead singer on "Milano" save the track from being a mere straight-to-art-house-movie-soundtrack instrumental.

Three years after their breakthrough album *Ágætis Byrjun* declared to the world their clear intentions to be taken seriously as craftsmen and not just entertainers, (in the same way Bjork famously declared herself to be a "sound scientist" rather than a musician), this album comes along to raise the stakes even further, Sigur Ros, it seems to be saying, is a philosophy of sound not just a musical outfit, and in this context our reaction as an audience, as bewitched spectators would probably be to echo the sentiments of the title track "Takk" which is, after all the Icelandic for "Thanks".

Hich Yezza is the Editor of Ceasefire and a member of the Editorial Committee of the Voice Magazine

www.voice-mag.co.uk

REVIEWS: BOOKS

KAZUO ISHIGURO: A PROFILE

Hich Yezza

"I don't deny the obviously admiral Ok, here's a confession: this is a rewritten opening paragraph, my original version started by saying "Of course, you've heard of Ishiguro, but ..." anyways it seems this struck the good people at The Voice Editorial HQ as rather too presumptuous of me and I glumly agreed to amend things accordingly, so, here goes...

Of course you haven't heard of Ishiguro, but here's why you should: If Ishiguro was a musician, he would be Michael Jackson (or at least the 1989 Michael Jackson) producing an Album every four years or so and re-setting the artistic standard every time.

Consider this: In a career spanning 25 years, Ishiguro wrote no more than six novels, when the likes of Tom Clancy and John Grisham seem to be churning out six novels a year, yet Ishiguro has managed, with just this half a dozen works to get himself into the pantheon of the very best writers on the planet.

First the prizes: several monstrously famous and talented writers have spent decades waiting to be nominated for this literary prize or that. Think of people like Martin Amis or Beryl Bainbridge who keep being reminded of the prizes they never seem to win. Now look again at Ishiguro, in 1982, at the ripe old age of 28 his first Novel "A Pale View of Hills" about a Japanese widow in Britain revisiting her post-war past, wins the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. Four years later, his second Novel "An Artist of the Floating World" devoted to the story of an artist caught by the undercurrent of history, wins the Whitbread book of the year award

and is short-listed for the top award in the land: The Booker prize.

Three years later, in 1989, his third novel "The Remains of the Day" wins the damn thing, The Booker prize win and the Hollywood adaptation that comes along seem to have induced a mini-coma for the next novel takes him six years to write. It's called "The Unconsoled" although I personally refer to it as "The Brick", a mammoth 500 pager that is so incredibly absurd it HAS to be a work of genius, it actually made me jump up in scandalised fits of incredulous laughter quite a few times while reading it, convinced this was an obscene practical joke by an author wanting to know how far his readers would follow him down the most Kafkaesque labyrinth since Kafka himself.

Of course, his intention (to me at least) was crystal clear, the guy obviously wanted to deliberately write the most unlikely Novel to win a prize that could ever be! And yet, it seemed that even an incredibly long, incredibly farcical, incredibly grotesque work of unbelievable aimlessness did not protect the poor fellow from winning yet another prize (this time the Cheltenham Prize for fiction) and for critics up and down the land to call it an "instant classic" and "a masterpiece", I can easily picture him in his kitchen with a dropped jaw re-reading the reviews and muttering to himself "This MUST be a mistake, that book was a joke for god's sake".

His two following novels were complete disasters in comparison, "When we were orphans" (2000) got nominated for both the Whitbread and The Booker, and "Never Let Me Go" (2005) was nominated for the Booker which, for anyone, would have been the pinnacle of a writer's career but for Ishiguro was widely interpreted as a sign of losing form! (To reprise the earlier analogy, think of Michael Jackson, selling 30

million copies of "Bad" and then turning on the TV to find experts crying over his declining popularity just because "Bad" didn't match the whopping 50 million copies of Thriller), in Ishiguro's case, it seemed the Bookers and Whitbread judges twice blinked at the last moment and found it just too embarrassing to keep showering this guy with all these prizes when so many grand authors went twenty years and twenty books without a single miserable nomination.

Why am I talking about the prizes rather than the Novels? Well, I do find it a fascinating topic and so on, but the main reason is basically to convey how good an author Ishiguro is, his success is anything but a fluke, no one can show such a level of consistency without having unquestionable mastery of the form. Are you intrigued enough to want to read more? I suggest you start by reading "The Remains of the Day", his most "commercial" offering, about a butler in 1930s England. It is a testament to a dying culture and a bygone era but also a very sad and thoughtful look at what it means to dedicate your life to the service of others.

You can read the others in whichever order you wish AS LONG as you keep the "Unconsoled" till last, trust me, that Novel will have you for breakfast before you could say "I'm floating inside my head", in other words, it's a big book for big readers and yes, that's a challenge, and if you want to take me up on it: You're on!

Just email TheHich@hotmail.co.uk as soon as you feel your brain melting.

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REVIEWS: FILMS

MUNICH (2005)

Khalid Shroufi

I went to see Munich with an open mind. I expected anything from anti-Palestinian propaganda to an indictment of state sponsored killing by Israel.

Without wanting to spoil the film, it was a mix. Even though the focus of the film is meant to be on the aftermath of the 11 Israeli athletes killed in the Munich Olympics, there

are repeated flash backs to their tragic death.

Whereas Spielberg managed to capture the sombre mood in Saving Private Ryan, but especially in Schindler's list, Munich seems like an action adventure at times.

The story is told from the perspective of the Mossad secret service killers, and you are lulled into cheering when they blow the next person up on there.

But the film is also insightful in other ways.

Black September respond to one of there members being killed by committing another terrorist act, and paraphrasing one of the Mossad agents "whoever we've killed, they just replace with someone ten times worse". Wise words that neither side can kill its way out of a conflict.

Finally you get a glimpse of espionage, Americans, Russians: they all want a say in what happens. If you don't mind watching a long film then, then this is an interesting but mixed film. 6.5/10.



REVIEWS: FILMS

JARHEAD

(2005)

Hich Yezza



The first thing you need to know about this all-out-mayhem action-packed fast-paced guns-and-bullets bonanza of a movie is, of course, that it's NOT an all-out mayhem action-packed fast-paced guns-and-bullets bonanza of a movie. In fact, it's only a war movie in its setting, terminology and shorthand. But there's very little of the rough stuff itself and if that's what you're after then that's not where you're going to find it.

This is the third film from Sam Mendes, the Oscar Winning British director of "American Beauty" and "Road to perdition" and although his trademark emphasis on atmospheric choreography is less obvious in his new offering the "search for your soul" angst is unmistakably there alright, so if you're a Mendes aficionado, you can relax!

Based on the best-selling novel by Anthony Swafford, a first Gulf War veteran, it charts his personal history as Marines recruit (played by Jake Gyllenhal) from his first steps into the army as coy, uncertain teenager, overshadowed from the start by the reputation of his Vietnam War hero father and obviously uncomfortable with the very high, perhaps unrealistic, expectations that come as a result.

There's a lot I don't like about Jamie Foxx, he's a fine actor (His performance in Collateral was commendable) but his Best Actor Oscar for "Ray" was, as far as I'm concerned, a blatant pandering to the sob-story shenanigans of showbiz Biopics that the narcissistic Hollywood crowd finds it impossible to resist. I was therefore quite happy to see a different performance altogether from the Oscar winner. In this movie, Foxx

performs the role of Swafford's superior, Staff Sgt Sykes, a jaded war-junky who not only thrives on the dust and heat of action but who happily admits that he finds sedentary life in the suburbs a far more frightening prospect than undergoing an enemy onslaught curled-up in the trenches (who doesn't?). There's of course an assortment of other misfits and "people with issues" who form a "dirty-dozen" type of band and needless to say, there's a lot of the bonding, initiation and rites of passage vignettes that are standard-fare in all war movies. Some of them are bland clichés (The predictable battering the newcomer receives on his first day) and some are more daring (An assembled audience of soldiers relishes a just-received home-made sex video before one of the soldiers quickly realises it features his wife).

At the risk of sounding like a demented Soixante-huitard anti-orientalist I'd like to say a few words about the treatment of Arabs in this movie. A few words are needed anyway because the Arabs only feature in one short scene and say nothing beyond some vague distant mumbling. In this ludicrous (and allegedly fictional) scene, a group of travelling Bedouins are looking for whoever has shot their camel (we learn later it was US soldiers), the scene ends with Swoff

heroically preventing his colleagues from kicking their ass by convincing the Arabs to take a hike, now I am a fairly reasonable person, but THIS? I mean, plllwwweaaaase!

Anyhow, although the film does linger on for too long, and although certain aimless interludes towards the end do struggle in sustaining the audience's interest, the film does succeed in building a believable cast. The dialogue, though riddled with the usual vacuous "This is war, buddy" nonsense, does carry enough episodic flashes of biting humour and sharp observational wit to make it worth your time.

Jarhead may not be the defining movie of the first Gulf war, that movie is yet to be made, but it's certainly a useful reference point for future attempts and for this, Mendes should be thanked and told gently "Well done mate, now do get back to your usual stuff will ya?". Of course, if all you wanted in the first place was an all-out-mayhem action-packed fast-paced guns-and-bullets bonanza then you should've just rented out a Saving Private Ryan DVD.

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ACTIVISM ON CAMPUS

<http://www.su.nottingham.ac.uk/~environ/home.htm>

This is the website for the University of Nottingham Students' Union Environment & Social Justice committee.

It is what you expect in that it tells you what this committee has been doing, but it does so much more. It's a great resource for

anyone interested in environmental and social justice issues. But it also has heaps and heaps of content on campaigns that have been run by the committee, for example a great page on Clean Investment, complete with petition that, by the way has reached over 1000 signatures. There's also a Green guide on there for those of you

interested in finding out how to live a life that treads lightly on the earth. And there's more! It's kept updated really regularly with campaigns going on all round the world, and an events diary so you won't be missing anything that's going on. So give it a clicky, and find out something amazing.

