

Empire No More!

By Ken Coates,

Reviewed by Bruce Kent

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Against greed and violence we have hope

KEN COATES never ceases to amaze. Far from becoming a dormant volcano, he continues to erupt with all the non-stop energy which I first experienced in the early days of the 1980s when the European Nuclear Disarmament campaign was launched.

Now, he is the inspiration behind the [Bertrand Russell Peace](#) Network for Peace and Human Rights which has been meeting in the European Parliament building in Brussels since 2002.

This is a collection of more than 30 of Ken's essays written in preparation for the Russell Network and since its foundation. It is an invaluable assortment. Recent history soon gets confused and even forgotten. But not on these pages.

The essays are grouped together under five headings: "War on Yugoslavia", "Nuclear War Revisited", "Europe and Militarism", "The War in Iraq and Peace" and "Human Rights". The collection concludes with an afterword from Arundhati Roy's closing speech at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2003. "Our strategy", she then said, "should be not only to confront empire but to lay siege to it...the corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling - their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability."

Wherever one dips into the collection something grabs the attention. I had forgotten how remarkably the Red Cross report of 2004 on violations of the Geneva Convention by occupying forces in Iraq had somehow passed

Britain's special representative in that country on its way to a desk in Whitehall. There, despite its gravity, it also never got drawn to the attention of any minister, let alone the Prime minister.

Opened again at a different place and out comes the story of Hans Blix's missing pages. Some 450 out of 3,000 pages of the report of the United Nations Monitoring, verification and Inspections Commission were simply removed by someone and quantities of supporting documentation disappeared into thin air.

Sad, personal stories are in these pages as well. How could Vaclav Havel, once such a hero, come to justify the bombing of Yugoslavia, a NATO action without any UN mandate? Havel justifies himself by reference to a higher law which has its roots "outside the empirical world. For, whereas the state is the work of man, man is the work of God." When politicians start claiming a divine mandate, we all now we are in for trouble.

Ken Coates must have either an incredible memory or computer-obsessed secretary. Time and again, lively opinion is backed up with solid fact and named and dated documents. Like his great END colleague E. P. Thompson, William Blake is for him a major inspiration - hence the collection's title, taken from Blake's *A Song of Liberty*.

It is a hopeful title. The empire of violence and greed is not invulnerable. Collections such as this one help to keep our feet on the ground while our eyes on the horizon.