

Reviews

Whither Eurasia?

Vassilis K. Fouskas, *Zones of Conflict*, Pluto Press, 177 pages, hardback ISBN 0 74532 030 9 £45, paperback ISBN 0 74532 029 5 £14.99

This most interesting book is an extended discussion of the thesis of Zbigniew Brzezinski in *The Grand Chessboard*. Fouskas begins by taking Brzezinski's text as his theme: 'Eurasia has been the centre of world power' ever since the continents began to interact politically.

'Russia, Austro-Hungary, France, the Ottoman Empire, Britain and Germany all wanted to dominate this bizarre landscape ranging from the French shores of the Atlantic down to the Persian Gulf, and from the Chinese land mass to Central Asia, the Black Sea, the Turkish Straits and the Suez. Brzezinski observes that all of the powers claiming mastery over Eurasia in the past were part of its landscape, but now "for the first time ever, a non Eurasian power has emerged not only as the key arbiter of Eurasian power relations, but also as the world's paramount power".'

Brzezinski's is now the voice of an older generation of American strategists. He very much supported the enlargement of Europe, because it would 'expand the range of American influence'. But he was firmly committed against the 'deepening of European social and political integration', seeing this as a straightforward challenge to American supremacy. He was very much in favour of the enlargement of Nato, as a device for extending military influence and American hegemony over wider areas, including the former Communist world. Initially famous as the voice of 'human rights', he was reproached with inconsistency upon the publication of *The Grand Chessboard*, because the book was stiff with *realpolitik*. There was no contradiction, he replied to critics.

'I elaborated that doctrine (of human rights) in agreement with President Carter, as it was the best way to destabilize the Soviet Union. And it worked.'

Well, perhaps it worked once. Will it work again? This is the rueful question which may well be asked about the world's new police force against weapons of mass destruction. This may well find the next and subsequent military actions progressively more difficult to undertake than the earlier, and no American administration will readily find acceptance of its agenda for human rights in the aftermath of the concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay, and Mr. Brzezinski's candid admission.

Nato stratagems have also been wearing thin. Once the new post-jubilee Nato had undertaken its first direct military engagement, in Kosovo, the American forces began to find this brilliant engine of dominance had its downside. Nato was, after all, an alliance, governed by a Council of its Member-states, even if

these might be bypassed much of the time. There was no way in which they could conduct a war without meeting. And as soon as they met, they disagreed. There were different priorities, different military polices, different personalities, and different national interests. Before the end of the Kosovo confrontation, key American generals were, if not eating the rugs on HQ floors, at any rate strongly moved to promise themselves 'never again!' Bombing policy, targeting, military planning, all became objects of contention, frustration and ultimately, rage.

So cauterizing was this experience to prove, that no attempt was made to mobilise Nato after the attack of 9/11 once the invasion of Afghanistan had been fixed upon. Now the preferred formula for military alliance was to be the 'alliance of the willing', in which all the orders could be given by Americans, and subordinate powers could be co-ordinated, or perhaps dropped, at will. Since then, willing though they may have been, Nato has not been invited to join the occupation of Iraq, even though some Member-states were almost pathetically anxious so to do.

The modern American alliance is of those willing to abandon any pretension to lead or determine their own polices. The numbers of the willing are therefore likely to shrink over time.

All these developments have been sharpening up since Fouskas completed this text: but he could already see some of the tensions which were afflicting Brzezinski's model.

Military power is not enough, even for the most powerful military in the world. Fouskas tells this as it is:

'America's military might and global reach notwithstanding, it can never violently confront a politically united Europe/Eurasia, for American national identity does not really function as a unifying element of America's social order. In the main, America's modernity is a by-product of Eurasia, that is to say, of its ethnic identities and industrious peoples.

Despite the shortcomings of the European Enlightenment and the regressive/divisive aspects of Europe's nationalisms...national identities across Europe are so well embedded that they need no further artificial boost from their political élite. If a concerted effort were made to advance notions of European citizenship and European social and political order, then Europe's national identities could coexist peacefully, projecting an image of fraternity, solidarity and social justice.'

The emerging unity of Europe, for Fouskas, affords a bridge in ethnic and cultural pluralism, across which the other America, based on American pluralism, can be reached. The implosion of the third way at the end of the '90s has left space for a new democratic alliance, which can reach from Europe out to Russia and China, and seek to shape a new Eurasia, able to assert its own values, and ultimately transform America.

Ken Coates

‘Utopians’

John Platts-Mills, QC, *Muck, Silk and Socialism: Reflections of a Left-wing Queen’s Council*, Paper Publishing, Oldwood Cottage, Wedmore, Somerset, BS28 4XW, 687 pages, hardback ISBN 0 95399 490 2 £28

Archie Potts, *Zilliacus: a Life for Peace and Socialism*, Merlin Press, 227 pages, paperback ISBN 0 85036 509 0 £14.95

Denis Healey, whilst still head of the Labour Party’s International Department, summed up how he saw the thinking of the ‘Old Labour’ of his day.

‘Much of the Party still took a utopian view of world politics. Many at every level of the movement still had their pre-war illusions about Stalin’s Russia as the workers’ paradise. An even larger number distrusted the United States. Above all, there was general reluctance to accept that the defeat of Hitler and Mussolini had not in itself created the conditions for a lasting peace. With so much to do at home, the idea of continuing to direct resources to defence was universally unwelcome.’

These two books celebrate the lives of two of the foremost ‘utopians’, who perpetually tested the patience of Ernest Bevin, Healey’s mentor, and were to become a byword for fellow-travelling. In fact, both men were expelled from the Labour Party, alongside three other Labour MPs, as the new Cold War began to take wings. Widely denounced as ‘crypto-Communists’, they were invested by their opponents with a fictitious uniformity of views, which quickly unravels if one reads these two most interesting books.

Zilliacus was a pioneer of the League of Nations, and a genuine expert on international affairs. Platts-Mills worked for sixty years as a barrister, and conducted a number of high profile cases. His book is nothing if not readable. It follows his migration from New Zealand to Oxford, and the beginning of his friendship with the Czechoslovak refugee, Otto Sling, when both were working in London in various anti-fascist causes. With the outbreak of war, after some remarkable political adventures, he found himself working in the mines as a Bevin boy in Doncaster. From there he became a member of the post-war House of Commons, part of the great influx of Labour Members which found him sitting alongside Zilliacus in 1945.

Platts-Mills is nothing if not candid. ‘I must have been world Stalin lover number one’ he wrote.

‘When Khrushchev denounced him in February 1956, I still would not accept it. I reasoned “if there is a conspiracy in Moscow this is it: a conspiracy to rob Stalin of his just fame as a saviour of the world from the Nazis”.’

But at last the penny dropped. His old friend Otto Sling had been murdered in 1952, after a dreadful mock trial in which Zilliacus himself had been cited as an agent of British Intelligence.

Zilliacus, if not world Stalin lover number two, had earned an unjustified reputation for putting the telescope to his blind eye when approaching all things Soviet; but this was abruptly dashed when Stalin expelled Yugoslavia from the family of Communist States, and Tito was anathematised as a Fascist and arch traitor. Zilliacus not only defended Tito, but campaigned on behalf of the Yugoslav Communists who had been so gravely traduced. By this time he was unacceptable to official Labour, and 'Titoism' made him anathema to official Communists. He was to receive a bitter lesson from the Slansky trial in which Otto Sling was sentenced to death, because this was but the latest judicial scandal in a series of monstrous frame-ups which had begun with the Moscow trials of the late 1930s, which hitherto had always been defended by Zilliacus himself and his co-thinkers.

These books could be taken as extended apologias for two victims of an elaborate con-trick, or they could be seen as confessions of the gullible. But actually, they are much more interesting than that: they record the lives of two clever and idealistic people, who truly dedicated their lives to human betterment. It is difficult, even for the most agnostic and sceptical among us, to fail to find some common ground with two such men, who, when they were wrong, were spectacularly wrong, but when they were right gave us, more than once, new examples in courage and steadfastness.

G.Allen

Unethical Foreign Policy

Mark Curtis, *Web of Deceit: Britain's Real Role in the World*, Vintage, paperback ISBN 0 09944 839 4 £7.99

In January 2002, our Prime Minister visited India. According to Downing Street, the main purpose of this visit was to address industrialists, with the obligatory courtesy meetings with his Indian equivalents. His speech went mainly unreported, but shortly after these meetings I discovered a story on the BBC's World Service Urdu web site. It ran that the Indian defence minister George Fernandes disclosed that the issue of India acquiring Advanced Jet Trainers was raised by British Prime Minister Tony Blair with Prime Minister A B Vajpayee. These, of course, are the same jet trainers Britain sold to Indonesia as BAE Hawk jets, and under which could be slung all sorts of offensive anti-personnel munitions. All this took place at a time when India and Pakistan, two nuclear armed states, were in a stand-off over Kashmir.

Tony Blair's trip to India was to hustle for a billion pound arms deal from a developing country. So, what's new?

Mark Curtis's book *Web of Deceit, Britain's Real Role in the World* provides us with a level of detail and reference to sources relentlessly gathered together from reports and official government material which disclose the theme running

through British foreign policy since 1945. The theme certainly is not that proclaimed by New Labour, of being 'a force for good in the world'. New Labour has so distorted the English language that humanitarian intervention is understood by its recipients as the darkening of the skies above their wretched countries as the B52s fly over and drop their cargoes which most assuredly put thousands instantly out of their misery, but create a living hell of powerlessness and fear for those remaining.

It is the links between the political élites, the merchants of death and the defence of world capitalism that Curtis so well establishes. Old Labour and its complicity in the downfall of Mossadeq in Iran in support of the activities of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, now BP and referred to by satirists as Blair Petroleum, through to the Iraq of today. How can you argue on the one hand that your intervention in Kosovo is humanitarian, and yet state as Blair did that 'we will carry on pounding day after day after day, until our objectives are secured.' And what were these objectives? It turns out that the peace settlement at the end of the campaign was exactly that proposed by the Serbian National Assembly at Rambouillet before the start of the bombing.

Mark Curtis quotes from government documents which add greatly to his work because of the chatty, clubbable nature of one foreign office mandarin speaking to another. In Indonesia, where our record requires criminal investigation, Curtis quotes our man in Jakarta, Sir Andrew Gilchrist, in a cosy memo to the Foreign Office: 'I have never concealed from you my belief that a little shooting in Indonesia would be an essential preliminary to effective change.' I later met the said Sir Andrew in the Scottish town of Lanark. He was standing on a wooden platform, in full highland dress, taking the salute at the World Pipe Band Championships. By then he was out of diplomacy but into quangos as the Chairman of the Highlands and Islands Development Board, placed there by Ted Heath no doubt for services rendered. Fortunately for our highland peoples the establishment no longer had the services of the Duke of Cumberland.

Henry McCubbin



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