

Reviews

Empire

Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2000, 478 pages, hardback ISBN 0674251210, £25.95, paperback ISBN 0674006712, £12.95

David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford University Press, 2003, 253 pages, hardback ISBN 0199264317, £16.99

Empire, and the American empire in particular, has become a favourite subject of study by historians, economists, sociologists and even philosophers and literary critics. Indeed, so many writers about the American empire have begun to refer back to a book published in the year 2000 by the Italian philosopher Antonio Negri, together with the American professor of Literature, Michael Hardt, simply titled 'Empire', that it seems to have become required reading for students of imperialism. Opening the book of 478 pages, it appears that by the year 2002 a twelfth printing had been necessary. So this review may seem somewhat out of date to some *Spokesman* readers. It should be of considerable interest, however, to supporters of the World Social Forum and seems to have inspired the *Guardian* columnist, George Monbiot, in his latest book, *Manifesto for a New World Order*. This is because of Hardt's and Negri's faith in the 'multitude' which 'will magically rise up to inherit the earth', as David Harvey summarises their conclusions. At the other pole, *Empire* has been welcomed by the US State Department's semi-official publication *Foreign Affairs*. This in turn is because Hardt and Negri see American empire as fulfilling Thomas Jefferson's judgement of the US Constitution: 'I am persuaded no constitution was ever before so well calibrated as ours for extensive empire and self-government.'

Hardt and Negri start from the claim that the US empire is unlike previous imperialisms because it has no territorial fixes. With 725 US military bases dotted about the earth's surface, not to mention all the US satellites circling the earth, that would seem to be debatable. The point they are making is rather that the US empire is not limited in territory, as previous empires were, but is universal. More than this, empire is what they call 'bio-political', generating 'bio-power', that is to say, not only political and economic, but social and cultural influence embracing the whole person of all those living on the planet. Coercion is needed, but that is only to ensure that all can enjoy Jefferson's promise of self-government. This allows for the 'moral intervention' not only of religious and other non-governmental organisations, but of inter-national government agencies and the US government itself. Hardt and Negri write of this empire as it 'extends and consolidates the model of network power' – the networks of capital, labour and technology.

Hardt and Negri see the nation states withering away as prime movers and remaining only as agents of international capital, but there is a pyramid of

national power with the United States at the pinnacle, holding hegemony over the global use of force. This is not to say, they insist, that the US provides a transcendent centre of capital. It presides over a network. In language that is deeply opaque, they write:

‘Through the social development of capital, the mechanisms of modern sovereignty – the processes of coding, overcoding and recoding that imposed a transcendent order over a bounded and segmented social terrain – are progressively replaced by an *axiomatic*, that is, a set of equations and relationships that determines and combines variables and coefficients immediately and equally across terrains without reference to prior and fixed definitions of terms’ (*Empire*, pp.326-7).

Make what you can of that! They are presumably referring to the working of world markets. But David Harvey reminds us that markets are heavily influenced by monetary regimes, which are very much in the ‘transcendent’ hands of the Wall Street-US Treasury-IMF complex.

The whole thrust of the argument in the Hardt and Negri book is that since the days of the Caesars and absolute monarchs we have looked at empires ruled from the top downwards. The rule of capital, however, has to be seen from below, responding always, whether by control or consent, to the initiatives of labour, positive or negative. This argument is all the more telling today, when capital movements have become not only increasingly global, but increasingly free of nation state controls. At the same time they aver that ‘In empire and its regime of bio-power, economic production and political constitution tend increasingly to coincide’ (*Empire*, page 41). In what they call the ‘post-modern age’ the base and superstructure of Marx’s model become merged. The main reason for this is not so much the change in capital, though that is ever more global in operation, but the change in labour.

The change in the nature of the proletariat, that is to say all those exploited by capital, results from what Hardt and Negri see as the development of network production in which communication lies at the centre of production, communication that has no need for Marx’s mass workers and no territorial limits. The bargaining power of individual workers, skilled or mass, disappears, but at the same time what was for Marx ‘variable capital’, labour becomes an ‘autonomous agent of production’, logging onto the network at will. One has to stop at this point and ask whether, since in production capital owns the network of pay, there is not some conflict of ideas here. Hardt and Negri understand perfectly that ‘Capitalism sets in motion a continuous cycle of private reappropriation of public goods: the expropriation of what was common.’ (*Empire*, page 301). So, where lies the proletariat’s autonomy?

We have to turn to David Harvey, whose work Hardt and Negri quote to explain the new hierarchies in capitalist accumulation and commodification (*Empire*, page 154). After the abstruse and convoluted language of Hardt and Negri, the clear and simple English of David Harvey is a joy to read. He starts by asking what drove the Bush government into the war in Iraq. Was it to

reinforce the position of a non-elected President, was it to divert attention from growing social problems at home, was it to control the dwindling reserves of oil, was it to boost a failing economy? Harvey believes that all these factors played a part but that there are deeper political/economic developments to be understood. These arise from the contradictions inherent in the capitalist system, most particularly the over-accumulation of capital, not just from the falling consumption of exploited workers, but more seriously from the failing opportunities for profitable investment. Following Rosa Luxemburg, Harvey believes that capital needs always to expand, requiring fields somewhere 'outside' the system, at first in undeveloped regions and then where?

David Harvey's book contains a long section on 'How America's Power Grew'. This is a story of continuous territorial expansion into the whole North American continent, followed by extension of power first in the rest of the Americas and then world-wide. But Harvey follows Giovanni Arrighi in distinguishing the capitalist logic of power which has no bounds and the territorial logic which requires a spatial fix. These two logics do not always coincide, and may conflict. A good example is the failure of Joseph Chamberlain at the beginning of the Twentieth Century to convert the City of London to the idea of imperial preference. British capital was interested in investment opportunities in the whole world, not just in the British Empire. Capitalist competition always tends towards monopoly positions in any region, but a monopoly of the whole world market implies the danger of overreach, such as brought down all earlier empires – Rome, Venice, Holland, Britain. With over 700 bases, with military expenditure exceeding that of many other states combined and with escalating costs of the occupation of Iraq, the United States too may be approaching its nemesis.

It is David Harvey's revision of Marx's theory of capitalist crisis that is most interesting. Marx assumed that capital accumulation proceeded through expanded reproduction, so long as the necessary conditions were in place – of private property, free markets, guarantees of contract, law and order, a trustworthy money as both store of value and means of exchange, and a facilitating state. Primitive accumulation – by theft and tribute and the expropriation of the commons – was relegated to an earlier stage of capitalist development. Harvey, by contrast, sees such predatory practices as persistent and continuous and gives examples: the privatisation of public assets, mergers and acquisitions of companies, asset stripping and asset destruction through inflation, raiding of pension funds, corporate fraud, and credit and stock manipulations. These he summarise as 'accumulation by dispossession', the problem for capital being that the process requires increasing coercion in place of the consent on which capitalists have always relied for their legitimation.

It is this shift in United States foreign policy from hegemony by consent to domination by coercion that Harvey believes marks the change under the Bush regime from the influence of neo-libs to neo-cons. He seems to be remarkably optimistic that if liberal Europe will just give the liberal forces in America the

benefit of the doubt, then these forces will be successful in their struggle to curb the current militarism in US government circles. Perhaps Hardt and Negri have in mind the same hope when they write in what I can only call 'gobbledegook':

'On the terrain of production and regulation of subjectivity, and in the disjunction between the political subject and the economic subject, it seems that we can identify a real field of struggle in which all the gambits of the constitution and the equilibria among forces can be reopened – a true and proper situation of crisis and maybe eventually of revolution.' (*Empire* page 321)

Harvey's fears, which he expresses writing in his last pages, are that the spread of world-wide anti-American feelings will, he thinks, only make the struggle against militarism all the harder. The revelations in recent weeks of the use of torture by US forces in Iraq must surely reinforce his fears. But it is at least possible that such anti-American revulsion may on the contrary serve to turn Americans away from the whole Empire project.

Michael Barratt Brown

Whitewash on fast spin

Simon Rogers (editor), *The Hutton Inquiry and its Impact*, Guardian Books with Politico's Publishing, 2004, 400 pages, paperback ISBN 1842751069, £7.99

It's nice for a change, but a bit harder, doing a review of a book that's already getting a good showing in the bookshops, and on an issue that keeps developing. The issues are so important that the book deserves the widest possible circulation, and close reading. It's well organised and edited too, for a quick publication, though I'd have preferred even more nuggets of information, and an index, and maybe a bit less of *The Guardian* think pieces, since we already get the gist of them in the daily paper.

On the issues, it's obvious that the general reception to Hutton has been that it was a whitewash job, even though speculation during the inquiry process hyped it up as potentially terminal for Blair and Campbell and Hoon and some of the top dogs in the cloak and dagger world of intelligence. I didn't think this was at all likely: in the British system, judges do not bring down governments, even if maybe they ought to have a due role in triggering such a process.

So whitewash was expected, but for me something bigger happened, too. I think Hutton was weak-wristed with the whitewash but, more importantly, was the servant of some very strategic spin..

Before explaining what I mean by strategic spin, can I also say that the whitewash – to experienced observers – was maybe deliberately pretty thin. Was it designed, perhaps, to offer only a minimum veil of protection to Blair,

Campbell and Hoon? Was there an element of 'Blair futures' about it all? My sense is that if there was a halfway credible successor to Brown as Chancellor, which is all that big business really bothers about, then Blair would be well on his way by now. Not that a change at the top would make much difference to policy, of course.

But back to big spin: this has two aims. Firstly, there is damage limitation, which is essential for people in public life who make cock-ups. And secondly, so called 'closure', or 'moving on' to another agenda. (Incidentally, 'closure', which sounds very posh and formal, has its origins in pulp romance fiction and soap television series where one romance partner needs to be finished off – 'closed' – in order to introduce another lover and keep the reader's attention from probing too deeply ...)

The hard bit of this review is that things have truly moved on since Hutton, so we can't read the book the same way that we might have read it a few days after the Report came out. Now we have two big events to take into consideration. Both are central to the developing story, and both involve strategic spin.

One was Clare Short's revelation about the United Kingdom (and the United States) spying on Kofi Annan's office. The other was the Madrid bombings and the political response of the Spanish electorate. Both fit my theme of spin being more important than whitewash. Or, to be more formal, that decoding spin matters more to effective political opposition than complaining about whitewash.

The spin in the United Nations spying revelation was to try and see that no one asked what the spying was for. It was presented as somehow routine if regrettable. I owe to Ken Coates of the Russell Foundation the instant perception that the spying was to find out about, and disrupt, the peace plan being designed by the small countries at the United Nations to head off the United States/United Kingdom invasion plans.

The Aznar Government's handling of the Madrid bombings shows spin coming wonderfully unstuck, when the people, aided by the practical experience of the rescue workers on the scene, saw that the blame-game against ETA was a cover up to avoid electoral punishment for Aznar going to war alongside Bush and Blair. My guess is that the international focus group consultants had told Aznar that he would suffer electoral punishment, and the ETA blame tactic was not spontaneous.

So, what of the spins around the Hutton Report and the death of Dr Kelly?

First comes the idea that we are governed by well-meaning folk, who keep honest and candid diaries, but can't always manage formal minutes of meetings; who, even in matters as important as going to war and undermining international law as we understood it, are so busy with other routine matters of government that they only have one or two key, and, in the circumstances, rather casual, open-attendance meetings to deal with a massive political crisis.

The spun idea of well-meanings and honest folk at the top was structurally sustained by the choice – in the sense of 'choice' or 'select' fruit and vegetables – of e-mails presented to Hutton. These carefully protected the back, for

example, of Jonathan Powell, Blair's Chief of Staff and, incidentally, the younger brother of Mrs Thatcher's foreign policy guru. It rested on the modest volume of written evidence, which, if I am right, was invited, not demanded, and treated at face value. I stress the point: it was highly selective. Or, to put the point more bluntly, its status as evidence was as little to be trusted as would be the volunteered evidence of a hardened criminal that he or she 'wasn't there, your honour, and I've got a bit of paper to prove it, and you'll have to take my word for it'.

But the alternative, of commanded and examined and investigated paperwork and telephone tapes, would have been a nightmare for them all. We have only to remember what happened to Nixon in the Watergate Inquiry.

And on the status of telephone evidence, incidentally, it is important to the Hutton judgment (page 314 of the book) that Dr Kelly told a friend that his leak was unauthorised in a telephone conversation. Questions about other people's phone conversations should have been in order. And tapes too.

Finally, on paperwork, the top policeman giving evidence reported that Dr Kelly's computers would have printed out a pile of paper twice as high as Big Ben. While this was no doubt meant to explain why this couldn't be evidence, we are asked to believe in the authority and representativeness of the modest quantity of self-selected paperwork from the top folk, who number dozens in comparison to a single technical expert.

So, I don't think the personal paperwork proved anything of consequence, but I can't name names because it might let somebody sue. Which calls to mind the case of Mr Campbell, in which I take the common view that it remains interesting that he didn't seem too keen to sue Mr Gilligan. That might have meant the diaries were examined under different rules. Or maybe it would have undermined the longer term value of the memoirs.

The spin of a nothing-to-hide and truly open government was further sustained by the appearance from the shadows of top intelligence officials in their best suits showing that our spies are really nice guys who are much deserving of their salaries from the taxpayers.

So, spin number one was to make us believe that we are governed by straightforward folk with nothing to hide in a workaday sort of political toy-town. Toy-town or nasty-town? Page 217 of the book records Dr Kelly's e-mail about 'many dark actors playing games' only hours before his death.

Spin number two, for me, concerns the matter of Dr Kelly being the sole, single source of the leak about the weapons of mass destruction evidence. The whole thing was narrowed down to the Gilligan report and Dr Kelly. My instinct is that right across the huge government machine people were leaking like mad, unauthorised, semi-authorised, accurate and misleading, and including auto-authorised leaks by people who wanted to protect their backs from potential disaster, and a war that remains deeply unpopular with some of the military and the top folk, quite apart from the public at large. Readers may like to follow the paper trail on this theme: strangely enough, the question of 'source' is at the heart

of the WMD dossier issue itself, as well as being central to the question of who leaked. I seem to recall that Dr Kelly thought he might be ‘a’ source, but note that he rapidly became ‘the’ source. No wonder he felt threatened.

The third spin can be put simply, but it is very important. It is that this was an entirely British affair, driven, if not well, by Mr Blair and those whose proper job it is to run the country and conduct wars and all that. I make the point bluntly: since Blair was the Siamese twin of Bush, you’d have thought some speculation might have taken place about what the Americans did, and did not do, and think about it all.

It would have been too much to hope for the truth from an inquiry. And aspirations about future inquiries must be at rock bottom. If we feel powerless, and come to expect whitewash, maybe we can take some heart, too. Recent times have shown that spin doesn’t always limit damage, or achieve closure. So trying to de-code it can have some effect in checking the power of politicians. It may be a bit complicated, but it can work as long as we also just keep on asking the simple questions. For example, why did Campbell go when he apparently did no wrong? How can a secretary of state for defence not know or recollect the meaning of something as crucial as which weapons had the 45 minute tag? And, less easily, what would have happened if Dr Kelly had lived? Would the leaks have stopped? Would there have been closure?

Regan Scott

Bush and Blair

Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, Simon and Schuster, 467 pages, hardback ISBN 074325547X , £18.99

Bob Woodward gives us the nearest thing we have had up to now of a fly on the wall account of how President Bush and Tony Blair came to launch their invasion of Iraq.

Woodward interviewed seventy-five of the key conspirators, and talked for three and a half hours with President Bush. He reveals what he could discover about the war plans, as they evolved, and portrays the principal actors with incisive economy.

The day before Thanksgiving, on November 21st 2001, Bush met with Rumsfeld for a discussion ‘in the utmost privacy’. ‘What kind of war plan do you have for Iraq? How do you feel about the war plan for Iraq?’ Rumsfeld did not think much of the existing plan: it did not represent the ideas of General Tommy Franks, and it ‘certainly didn’t represent his own thinking’.

It was, says Woodward, ‘Desert Storm II +’. The trouble was that it takes years to draft war plans. ‘The process was woefully broken and maddeningly slow. He was working to fix it.’ “Let’s get started on this” Bush recalled saying. “And get

Tommy Franks looking at what it would take to protect America by removing Saddam Hussein if we have to.””

The President was keen to know whether all of this could be done without attracting too much attention. But when Rumsfeld went to work, all the massive resources of the American military, Full Spectrum Dominance and all, were bent to this one pressing task.

By the following August, General Franks and his colleagues were ready to report on the reworked plans. This was no ideological blueprint: within the military mindset, it was necessary to destroy 4,000 possible targets, which would need 12,000 to 13,000 separate weapons. ‘A large building or complex might have four to twelve individual “aim points” for individual weapons – bombs or missiles’. In the Franks plan there were one hundred and thirty-odd targets with high collateral damage, ‘which was defined as possibly killing thirty or more civilians’. Rumsfeld would have liked to minimise that danger, and he told Franks to review the estimate and reassess it.

All this, involving the appropriate legions of military planners, was firmly unwinding before Tony Blair arrived in Washington to insist on the validation of the whole schema with a United Nations Resolution.

This is the story of the hatching of a war crime and it offers significant evidence for a future tribunal of investigation. In particular, it shows the lengths to which Bush was prepared to go in order to provide propitious circumstances for Blair to bring his forces on side in the coming invasion. It also documents in some detail the negotiations with Prince Bandar, the Saudi Ambassador. Blair was desperate that Bush should not say anything to frighten the children in the House of Commons, before he had got his vote for war. Bandar’s anxieties, by contrast, were that Bush might be prevailed upon to postpone his war if the Iraqis were to offer concessions acceptable within the majority of Security Council Members.

They got their war. They ‘won’ it quickly. But domination did not follow, and is highly likely not to follow. Instead, it is likely that both Bush and his satellites will fall, while new and unforeseen uncertainties blanket the Middle East and trouble the world.

R. Thomas

Will civilisation survive?

Robert Hinde and Joseph Rotblat, *War No More: Eliminating Conflict in the Nuclear Age*, Pluto Press, 2003, paper ISBN 0745321917, £10.95

I can remember sitting in meetings in the 1980s when debate raged as to whether CND was a ‘pacifist’ organisation. ‘Definitely not’, said many who spoke for the movement, ‘we are nuclear pacifists’. Now we have this book, which clearly

states that in the nuclear age we cannot risk war. It is not just enough to ban weapons of mass destruction, and especially nuclear weapons, but war itself must be eliminated.

It is interesting to see, also, how the views of others have moved on. The Foreword to *War No More* is written by Robert McNamara. This is the man who was part of the team which agreed a strategy of fire-bombing 67 Japanese cities, killing upwards of 1.9 million civilians. He later played key roles in the Cuba crisis and the Vietnam war. Yet he commends the book, and endorses the authors' aim of looking at 'how war can be abolished or, at a minimum, how the risk of war can be reduced'.

All those involved would want the widest possible audience for *War No More*. The very opening sentence states that 'This book is written to convince you, the reader, that if our civilization – indeed, the human species – is to survive in this nuclear age, war of all types will have to be abolished and peaceful means found to solve disputes.'

The authors tackle the oft-repeated justification for the retention of nuclear weapons: '...the generally held belief that a third world war was prevented by the existence of nuclear warheads, and that their presence in the arsenals is no cause for worry, is an illusion.' Contrast that, and the expanded arguments in the Nuclear Peril chapter, with statements from, for example, NATO's Strategic Concept (published in 1999 and unchanged): 'nuclear weapons preserve the peace' and 'NATO will maintain, at the minimum level consistent with the prevailing security environment, adequate (nuclear) sub-strategic forces in Europe'. Indeed, the Trident nuclear-armed submarines are 'integrated' into NATO and the US NATO forces keep nuclear warheads on at least seven bases in NATO states, including in the United Kingdom, at Lakenheath in Suffolk, and in Turkey. According to the authors, the fact that there has not yet been a nuclear exchange in a conflict must be put down 'more to good luck than good management'.

What is to be done? The authors are keen to promote peace education, arms control treaties, conflict resolution, and confidence building. They look at the role of intervention and the United Nations and the whole question of world governance. They certainly see that campaigning has a role, in which groups such as the CND, (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) and CAAT (Campaign Against the Arms Trade) must surely have key roles. In support of Hinde's and Rotblat's arguments, the group Movement for the Abolition of War has produced an educational video entitled 'War No More', with an accompanying booklet and guidelines for discussion.*

Rae Street

*Available from Movement for the Abolition of War, 11 Venetia Road, London N4 1EJ www.abolishwar.org.uk price £8.



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