

European Social Forum  
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# Another World Is Possible

## The European Social Forum Comes to London

*Ken Coates*

The European Social Forum was inspired by the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. This defined itself in distinction from the World Economic Forum at Davos, which took on its shoulders all the sins of neo-liberalism with the globalisation of greed. An impressive list of participants has been assembled from non-governmental organisations in a wide variety of countries. Now the European Social Forum will come to London, at the invitation of a number of activist groupings, with the support of London Mayor, Ken Livingstone. We are bound to wish it well, because there is a great vacuum where consequent political discussion used to take place, and there are many urgent social issues about which informed people need to share their experiences. It remains to be seen how widely the Social Forum will be able to cast its net, when it comes to England.

In several European countries at the same time, there are a number of key problems which would clearly benefit from joint analysis, and if it could be achieved, common action.

It is not difficult to see why the European Social Forums have established a prototype for this kind of convergence. Basing themselves on the traditions, and the Charter of Principles agreed by the World Social Forum (see p.38), which met in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the European Social Forum met first of all in Florence, and then, last year, in Paris. Each gathering attracted tens of thousands of participants, from a very wide variety of social movements, non-governmental organisations and trade unions.

The slogan of the World Social Forum, 'Another World is Possible', touched a vein of idealism and commitment which fired many young people to identify with it. It stood out in clear contrast to the compromised behaviour of so many established institutions in Europe, including, unhappy to say, many governments and established political parties. The World Social Forum made clear its opposition to 'the

*Ken Coates' new book, Empire No More! is just published by Spokesman (£11.99).*

process of globalisation commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions (which are) at the service of these corporations' interests'. It was able to draw on the practical experiences of non-governmental organisations and aid organisations, as well as movements in defence of the environment and community organisations with a wide variety of aims.

The World Social Forum found itself confronting a global power structure: but it did not retreat into parochialism, seeking instead to find the way to an alternative world. Just as it was finding new bases for coherence, the rising tide of militarism engulfed the world in new conflicts, culminating in the dreadful invasion of Iraq, in which Iraqi sources have identified thirty-seven thousand civilian deaths. (The Blitz of the Luftwaffe in England killed twenty-two thousand people.)

So it was that this continuing international discussion reached out from engaging with myriad social problems to embracing the growing world-wide peace movement. A predominant element of spontaneity governed this process, which represented a coming together of many tributaries, innumerable initiatives, and centres of goodwill.

In Britain, a political crisis which had already shown itself in numerous other European countries was becoming evident and acute. For decades, dissent in all its forms, and pressures of innumerable reforms, had found their focus in the Labour Party. Of course, not every critic of the established society could join that Party, but all were likely to find their behaviour influenced by it. But openness to all the schools of rebellion became identified with sterile oppositionism, and a new generation of political leaders arose which sought out and established a new conformity, based upon manipulation and media consent, and ruthless accommodation to the established powers. Assiduous courtship of the Murdoch news empire was but a token of the engagement of this new political establishment. No wonder it became important for any idealist, and all those alien to cynicism, to insist that 'another world is possible'. Legions of non-governmental activists, trade union members, Church militants and other volunteers found the prevailing official climate of public organisations increasingly oppressive. Even when good actions were performed by government, they were usually overlaid with spin and wider deception.

That is why, in England, there is a great deal of space for the European Social Forum, if it can maintain its ready traditions of openness and engagement with the important issues which continue to trouble our society.

One of these is clearly mass unemployment. In England, followers of the official statistics believe that this problem has been solved. But scholars who are willing to dig deeper, think not. Christina Beatty and Stephen Fothergill have looked in depth at the numbers of long-term sickness claimants, many of whom, for a considerable time, have been refugees from the provision for unemployment relief. They have concluded that, in parts of England, in the north, as well as in Scotland and Wales, there are some two and a half million

unemployed people, who depend on sickness related benefits to keep body and soul together, although in fact there are no jobs for them. The employment position in England has eased in recent years, but this level of hardship remains quite unacceptable.

When I was in the European Parliament, I drew on the earlier calculations of Stephen Fothergill and his colleagues in the course of preparing two pan-European Conventions of unemployed people, which met in the Parliament building in Brussels, and enabled the unemployed and sympathetic scholars and activists to compare notes and co-ordinate their efforts for the recovery of jobs. These Conventions drew support from all the main political Groups in the European Parliament, although they were initiated by members of the Socialist, Green and United Left Groups. Three of the most energetic activists in the European Parliament, who supported these initiatives, are no longer Members. But there are very many reasons why a forum of the unemployed is necessary, and indeed has become more necessary than it was, as the problem of unemployment has worsened in a number of countries, and gone underground in others.

These initiatives were part of a broader attempt to bring together groupings within civil society, in order to reinforce political attempts to deal with problems. My first initiative in this respect was the Pensioners' Parliament, which the European Parliament's Socialist Group agreed to promote, and which brought together five hundred-plus pensioners from every country in the European Union, to seek to compare provision and experiences between one country and another, and to try to agree on common goals. This meeting was deemed to have been very successful, so much so that it was repeated the following year as a joint initiative of all the Groups in the European Parliament.

I was very pleased when, quite spontaneously, a group of disabled people came to the European Parliament to ask for hospitality for a parliament of European disabled people. At first, many of the Parliament's officials were very sceptical about this request, but a powerful lobby among the handicapped, the blind, the deaf, and the victims of a wide range of disabilities, after a lobby of the wheelchairs and white sticks, won the agreement of a majority of Members of the Parliament, and the Disabled People's Parliament duly met in the newly opened hemicycle in Brussels. I was asked to give a brief opening speech, where I learnt the meaning of a prolonged session of waving by members of the audience. This, I was informed, was deaf people's applause.

The idea of the Social Forums is wider, and potentially more creative, since it can bring together people from an immense diversity of organisations, NGOs and specialist groups, and help to empower them by enriching the field of their contacts.

Previous efforts to develop wider associations of NGOs in practical collaboration tended to find their focus in the existing political organisations. But today it is a mark of gathering social crisis that worse problems are accompanied by fewer official openings for redress. Old social democracies sought to manage

change in society. Now, with some skill, they seek to understand and to manage change in the reporting of society, and the systematic manipulation and underweighting of its bad news. Thus we get a flow of tainted information, misleading statistics, fabricated intelligence. Today we have the age of the official lie. That is why inclusive and comprehensive meetings are so valuable, and should certainly be continued and developed.

But the experience of our people insists that another world is really possible, and invites us to move beyond our general forum, towards more specific and conventional meetings of minds, tracing out the lineaments of that other practice which will bring the other world into fruition.

# Charter of Principles

## *World Social Forum*

*Approved and adopted in São Paulo, on April 9, 2001, by the organizations that make up the World Social Forum Organizing Committee; approved with modifications by the World Social Forum International Council on June 10, 2001.*

The committee of Brazilian organizations that conceived of, and organized, the first World Social Forum, held in Porto Alegre from January 25<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, 2001, after evaluating the results of that Forum and the expectations it raised, consider it necessary and legitimate to draw up a Charter of Principles to guide the continued pursuit of that initiative. While the principles contained in this Charter – to be respected by all those who wish to take part in the process and to organize new editions of the World Social Forum – are a consolidation of the decisions that presided over the holding of the Porto Alegre Forum and ensured its success, they extend the reach of those decisions and define orientations that flow from their logic.

1. The World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Humankind and between it and the Earth.
2. The World Social Forum at Porto Alegre was an event localized in time and place. From now on, in the certainty proclaimed at Porto Alegre that ‘another world is possible’, it becomes a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives, which cannot be reduced to the events supporting it.
3. The World Social Forum is a world process. All the meetings that are held as part of this process have an international dimension.
4. The alternatives proposed at the World Social Forum stand in opposition to a process of globalization commanded by the large

multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations' interests, with the complicity of national governments. They are designed to ensure that globalization in solidarity will prevail as a new stage in world history. This will respect universal human rights, and those of all citizens – men and women – of all nations and the environment and will rest on democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of peoples.

**5.** The World Social Forum brings together and interlinks only organizations and movements of civil society from all the countries in the world, but intends neither to be a body representing world civil society.

**6.** The meetings of the World Social Forum do not deliberate on behalf of the World Social Forum as a body. No-one, therefore, will be authorized, on behalf of any of the editions of the Forum, to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants. The participants in the Forum shall not be called on to take decisions as a body, whether by vote or acclamation, on declarations or proposals for action that would commit all, or the majority, of them and that propose to be taken as establishing positions of the Forum as a body. It thus does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants in its meetings, nor does it intend to constitute the only option for interrelation and action by the organizations and movements that participate in it.

**7.** Nonetheless, organizations or groups of organizations that participate in the Forum's meetings must be assured the right, during such meetings, to deliberate on declarations or actions they may decide on, whether singly or in coordination with other participants. The World Social Forum undertakes to circulate such decisions widely by the means at its disposal, without directing, hierarchizing, censoring or restricting them, but as deliberations of the organizations or groups of organizations that made the decisions.

**8.** The World Social Forum is a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context that, in a decentralized fashion, interrelates organizations and movements engaged in concrete action at levels from the local to the international to build another world.

**9.** The World Social Forum will always be a forum open to pluralism and to the diversity of activities and ways of engaging of the organizations and movements that decide to participate in it, as well as the diversity of genders, ethnicities, cultures, generations and physical capacities, providing they abide by this Charter of Principles. Neither party representations nor military organizations shall participate in the Forum. Government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this Charter may be invited to participate in a personal capacity.

**10.** The World Social Forum is opposed to all totalitarian and reductionist views of economy, development and history and to the use of violence as a means of social control by the State. It upholds respect for Human Rights, the practices of real democracy, participatory democracy, peaceful relations, in equality and solidarity, among people, ethnicities, genders and peoples, and condemns all forms of domination and all subjection of one person by another.

**11.** As a forum for debate, the World Social Forum is a movement of ideas that prompts reflection, and the transparent circulation of the results of that reflection, on the mechanisms and instruments of domination by capital, on means and actions to resist and overcome that domination, and on the alternatives proposed to solve the problems of exclusion and social inequality that the process of capitalist globalization with its racist, sexist and environmentally destructive dimensions is creating internationally and within countries.

**12.** As a framework for the exchange of experiences, the World Social Forum encourages understanding and mutual recognition among its participant organizations and movements, and places special value on the exchange among them, particularly on all that society is building to centre economic activity and political action on meeting the needs of people and respecting nature, in the present and for future generations.

**13.** As a context for interrelations, the World Social Forum seeks to strengthen and create new national and international links among organizations and movements of society, that – in both public and private life – will increase the capacity for non-violent social resistance to the process of dehumanization the world is undergoing and to the violence used by the State, and reinforce the humanizing measures being taken by the action of these movements and organizations.

**14.** The World Social Forum is a process that encourages its participant organizations and movements to situate their actions, from the local level to the national level and seeking active participation in international contexts, as issues of planetary citizenship, and to introduce onto the global agenda the change-inducing practices that they are experimenting in building a new world in solidarity.



# The Europe We Need

*Robin Blackburn*

*Robin Blackburn is an editor of New Left Review and the author of Banking on Death, or Investing in Life: the History and Future of Pensions, published by Verso. He teaches in the Sociology Department at the University of Essex and can be reached on [roblack@essex.ac.uk](mailto:roblack@essex.ac.uk)*

Europe today faces three shocks which threaten its social institutions and aspiration for an independent role in world affairs. They are the shock of rampant United States power, the shock of Anglo-Saxon economics, and the shock of a poorly planned European Union enlargement. While these processes have a long-term character, they now possess enough concentrated force to paralyse European institutions, and to subject the continent to corporate-led globalisation domestically and to United States 'leadership', as the White House now calls its imperial role in global affairs. This is not the Europe the world – or its own citizens – needs.

Because the European Union is, at present, the only global entity with an economic weight and political potential equal to that of the United States, it has – in principle – the best possibility of defying the new hegemon. This should not at all be a question of making Europe more like the United States – a process which has already gone too far – but, instead, of ensuring that Europe represents a different social model and that on the international stage it refuses to chain itself to the chariot wheels of the Bush regime.

## **Europe's leaders trail behind the United States**

Europe has an opportunity for a creative response to the challenges it faces. This is partly because US leadership is itself in deep difficulties, above all in Iraq and the Middle East. And it is also because the sterile formula of Europe's own grotesquely-named 'growth and stability' pact has been breached by the European Union's two leading core states. This represents a break with the baneful rule of the European Central Bank and its disastrous monetarist dogmas.

Europe's response to the impasse of US strategy in Iraq, and to the crisis of European Union monetary governance, does not measure up to the opportunity presented. Rather, it

weakens Europe and betrays the hopes of peoples around the world who would like to see some check on US power.

The Nato allies protest publicly or privately about US 'unilateralism', but then proceed to endorse its consequences. The main Nato powers voted in the United Nations to give the US occupation and its plans a quite unwarranted post-facto legitimacy. As the United States gets into deeper trouble it will again expect its meeker allies to send more troops; that is to put their own citizens in harm's way, in order temporarily to contain a dangerous situation. George W. Bush and Colin Powell are already pursuing this policy, but John Kerry claims that he would have greater success.

At home, the rule of the European Central Bank will be rescued and recycled by giving even greater scope to explicit and 'implicit' privatisation. The latter is the process whereby public services and social protections are degraded in order to oblige the mass of citizens to buy social protection from rapacious finance and insurance houses. Blair, Raffarin, Schröder and Berlusconi have all been pursuing such commodification of social insurance and educational provision. Each have curbed pension provision, and created new opportunities for the financial services industry. However, the latter are looking for more generous tax relief for those who buy their products, a tax subsidy that would absorb much of their costly marketing. The next charge of the 'reformers' will be led by Nicholas Sarkozy, the French finance minister, and José Manuel Barroso, the newly appointed president of the European Commission.

The new course has encountered large-scale, but episodic, resistance: the peace demonstrations of 15 February 2003, strikes and demonstrations against pension cutbacks, opposition to student fees, the rejection of the government in the French local elections, the defeat of Aznar in Spain, and the drubbing administered to New Labour and most other ruling parties in the European elections in June 2004. Continuing attacks on education and welfare will create excellent opportunities to challenge the misleaders of Europe, and to open up conflicts and fissures in the 'grand coalition' of Schröder and Raffarin, Chirac and Sarkozy, Berlusconi and Blair. The disarray of the ruling parties furnishes an opportunity to spell out the core elements of an alternative to neo-liberal Europe.

But whether at home or abroad this alternative must break openly and clearly with what has gone before. In Spain, Zapatero, the Socialist leader, won because he had strongly opposed Spanish backing for the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. Europe's leaders have yet to register the political defeat that the occupiers have already suffered. There is only one way that a future Iraqi government could acquire legitimacy and that is to insist on the complete evacuation of occupation troops, the return of Iraqi oil and the cancellation of the decrees and acts of the occupation authority. If Europe backed the evacuation of the occupying forces, this would not only offer the chance for a new start in Iraq but would chime in with the hopes of tens of millions of Americans.

Europe's leaders also refuse to face the reality that the US economic model, far from being worthy of emulation, is today mired in failure. The collapse of

Enron was just the beginning of a rash of scandals which involve every leading financial institution on Wall Street. Over the last two years, Eliot Spitzer, the New York attorney general, has brought forward investigations and charges which show the large US banks and 'mutual funds' to have been allowing hedge funds to 'skim' (rob) the pension accounts of over ninety million savers. This was the consequence of de-regulation and 'financialisation'. It is accompanied by extravagant returns to chief executives and financial intermediaries, and heavy erosion of pension fund assets.

As 'Anglo-Saxon' economics advance in Europe, it has similar effects – without, so far, an Eliot Spitzer to expose their full scope. Europe now has its own string of corporate scandals – Parmalat, Shell, Vivendi, Ahold and others. These testify to the corroding effect of financial engineering and show how the latest ingenious products of the international banks and accounting firms can give new scope to age-old European traditions of élite corruption. Pension funds have been hit and many have seen their savings shrink. While new scope is given to the commercial banks and insurance houses, social gains such as the 35 hour week are being driven back by employers who can threaten re-location. Meanwhile, as the *Wall Street Journal* headline puts it, 'European CEO Pay is Taking Off'.<sup>1</sup>

### **Anglo-American corporate welfare destroys good jobs**

The US recession of 2000-3 destroyed two and a half million 'good' jobs, and the current weak recovery has seen few of those jobs replaced. The US public rightly worries that the regime of commercial social insurance, which excludes a fifth or more of the population, will fail even most of those it does cover over the next decade or two. Private pensions and health care suffer from a severe 'cost disease'. Competitive marketing consumes vast amounts of money while 'customising' provision for each individual is costly and cumbersome. The loss of manufacturing jobs is also rooted in the problems of large manufacturing concerns which now have large pension fund deficits (in the US these now total \$350 billion, in the UK £65 billion).

Many on the US left look to Europe for an alternative, but are increasingly disappointed when they do so. It is true that social protection remains far better in Europe. But even governments of the Left – like that of the Social Democrats and Greens in Germany – lacking the courage and imagination to find better ways to finance welfare, cut benefits instead. This is what Prodi's centre-left government in Italy did in the late 1990s and what he will do again if he ousts Berlusconi.

It is understandable that governments of the Left decline further to raise the already heavy taxes on employment. These taxes are generally not 'progressive'. They fall heavily on workers earning only average or low salaries. Laying a 'tax wedge' of 40 per cent on average incomes, they consequently weaken demand and discourage high rates of employment. With officially-recognised unemployment running at 10 per cent, and many of the unemployed not even getting on the register, certain categories of the population – above all the under-25s and the

over-50s – have been condemned to poverty and idleness. Not surprisingly, the demagogues of the far right have often flourished in these conditions.

If we compare the Anglo-Saxon economies with Europe we find that they generate different types of unemployment. Europe's high 'payroll taxes' weaken demand and deter the creation of formal jobs in the service sector, helping to explain why employment rates amongst the proportion of the population aged 18-65 are ten to fifteen percentage points lower than in the United States or the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

But the 'Anglo-Saxon' tradition of encouraging corporations to furnish tax-subsidised pension and health benefits has had a devastating impact on manufacturing employment. Many famous Anglo-American corporations find it impossible to maintain healthy levels of investment and employment because they are weighed down by pension and health deficits. Companies such as Ford, Boeing, American Airlines, US Steel, Goodyear, Maytag, Colgate-Palmolive, Unilever, BT, Rolls Royce and GKN have deficits in their pension funds worth more than half the value of the corporation itself. They are forced to divert huge sums of money to remedy those deficits and to fire thousands of employees.

The Anglo-American corporate welfare schemes are 'pro-cyclical'. That is to say that, during good times, the employers can take a 'contribution holiday' because the value of the shares in the fund rises. British corporations skipped £28 billion of pension fund contributions between 1988 and 2000, which is part of the reason that they are in deep deficit today. In bad times, when it is most difficult, the sponsoring corporation has to stump up cash, because the value of shares in the fund has dropped. The better designed European corporate schemes at least require companies to put away more as special 'reserves' in good times, when it is easier to do so. But all types of corporate-sponsored welfare have the drawback that they are linked to one company, which may itself fail, leaving employees with depleted benefits. In July, the collapse of Federal Mogul, a car parts supplier, halved the pension benefit of 20,000 British workers and cut the expected benefit of a further 20,000 in an associated company.

The pension fund promises that companies make are legally enforceable. This means they take precedence over current investment and current employees. The structure of corporate welfare encourages, or even obliges, companies in difficulties to rob Peter to pay Paul – or rather to sack Peter to pay Paul. The need to bale out pension funds has destroyed hundreds of thousands of jobs in high-end manufacturing in the United States. Likewise in the United Kingdom, manufacturing has been losing 5,000 jobs a week, but Gordon Brown, the Labour Chancellor, has maintained the overall employment level by creating more than half a million jobs in the public sector. (Also note that the real extent of UK unemployment is concealed by the fact that 2.3 million receive 'incapacity benefit', a figure four times as great as 20 years ago.) The end result is that, despite all the weakness of the continental European economy, its exports and manufacturing corporations are stronger than those of the United Kingdom and the United States.

It should be clear that Europe needs a better way of paying for proper old age and health protection than it has – but also a better one than the Anglo-American paths of individualisation or corporate welfare. We need to find other ways to finance the social programmes we need. There are still many positive features of the European social model. Working hours are short, but productivity is high. Decent health care is more widely available than in the United Kingdom, let alone the United States, with its inflated commercial charges. Europe's often beautiful countryside, its many handsome towns and cities, and the successful rehabilitation of several formerly-blighted industrial zones, all testify that a sense of the integrity of public space has not yet been entirely lost.

But the best way to defend what is good in the European social model is to go on the offensive, elaborating a new political economy, one capable of finding needed resources to underwrite social programmes, and of reigning in, and ultimately controlling, the forces of financialisation.

### **The share levy: a new way to finance future social spending**

It is now some time since governments of the Left dared to ask whether the owners of the large corporations might be obliged to contribute more to the wider society, without which their own profits would be impossible. The most far-seeing attempt to think through the types of new finance that would be needed to guarantee generous social provision was Rudolf Meidner's advocacy of 'wage-earner funds' in the 1970s and 1980s.

Rudolf Meidner was – together with Gosta Rehn – the architect of the Swedish welfare state. He was Chief Economist of the LO, Sweden's main trade union federation. He produced an impressive body of policy-oriented economic analysis that deserved – and still deserves – to win the Nobel Prize. A distinguishing feature of his approach was that the working of social funds was harmonised with both a wage-bargaining round and the protection of high employment levels.

Anticipating the new social expenditures that would be entailed by an ageing and learning society he argued for the setting up of strategic social funds to be financed by a share levy. This did not work like traditional corporate taxation, which subtracts from cash-flow and, potentially, investment. Instead Meidner's levy falls on wealthy shareholders, the value of whose holdings is diluted, not on the resources of the corporation as a productive concern. According to the original plan every company with more than fifty employees was obliged to issue new shares every year equivalent to 20 per cent of its profits. The newly issued shares – which could not be sold for several years – were to be given to a network of 'wage earner funds', representing trade unions and local authorities. The latter would hold the shares, and reinvest the income they yielded from dividends, in order to finance future social expenditure. As the wage earner funds grew they would be able to play an increasing part in directing policy in the corporations which they owned.<sup>3</sup>

Meidner's visionary scheme was strongly supported by trade unions and the

members of the Social Democratic party, but strongly opposed by the privately owned media, and by the ‘twenty families’ who dominate the country’s large corporations. After a scare campaign the Social Democratic government eventually withdrew the proposed share levy but set up social funds financed by a profits tax. These were wound up by the incoming Conservatives in 1992. So Meidner’s plan has yet to be tried.

### **The need for a new layer of European social provision**

The visible crumbling of Europe’s ability to protect its own citizens weakens its voice in world affairs. A determined effort to rescue its collapsing social model could be achieved if the Union itself sponsored at least some new social provision for all citizens. Interestingly enough, this was the approach of President Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s when the United States faced its own most serious social crisis. The Social Security Act of 1935 became the so-called ‘third rail’ of US politics. Eventually it covered everyone and the Social Security card became a badge of civic identity.

US Social Security redistributed from rich to poor – including from rich regions to poor ones – in ways that promoted a minimum of national unity. The European Union today has no social programmes. The best it has are so-called ‘convergence’ funds, the Common Agricultural Policy and schemes targeted at new members. But these do not cover everybody, as does Social Security, and have much less resources than the US programme. While the Common Agricultural Policy has a budget of 50 billion euros each year – roughly \$45 billion – US Social Security has a budget of nearly \$400 billion annually to pay old age and disability pensions for forty million US citizens.

Of course, US Social Security is far less generous than most European equivalents, and is today threatened with privatisation by President Bush. Nevertheless it does help to bind together the citizens of the different states and to help focus loyalty to the political order.

Three economists – James Galbraith, Pedro Conceicao and Pedro Ferreira – have argued for a ‘truly European welfare state, with a continental retirement programme’ and ‘the creation of major new universities of the first water...in the beautiful, lower income regions of the European periphery and the full funding of students to attend them.’<sup>24</sup>

A Europe-wide welfare regime could also encourage better child-care provision. The problem of the ageing society is as much the result of a low birth rate as it is of increased longevity. It is striking that today Scandinavia, with its generous attention to child care, has a much higher birth rate than Mediterranean Europe. It is also interesting that the introduction of the 35 hour week in France coincided with a small but significant recovery in the French birth rate. Improvements to social welfare, education and working conditions should be pursued for their own sake, but they will often contribute to a broader social framework of well-being.

A European-wide welfare regime should be organised on a universal basis so

that every citizen and every country receives some benefit. Special supplements might be available on a regional basis so that poorer regions in the wealthier states would also benefit.

If a European Union-wide Meidner-style corporate levy – set initially at ten per cent of corporate profits – was introduced, the resources raised could be put in the hands of regional networks of democratically-administered social funds. This should be conceived of as an addition to – not a replacement of – national welfare policies which, where necessary, might also be able to draw on emergency help from the Europe-wide fund. Levied on a continent-wide basis, the arrangements would contribute towards ‘tax harmonisation’ and help to deter social dumping. The new member states have low corporate taxes – Estonia’s are to be zero on reinvested profits – while their income taxes are broadly similar to those in many parts of Western Europe. Under a share levy scheme wherever corporations were located they would have to issue new shares to the social funds based on their profits anywhere in Europe. Two-thirds of the yield would be distributed to the fund network inside each member country and one-third would be distributed on a continent-wide basis in proportion to population. So the social funds located in new member states would benefit from a central as well as local distribution. This would not only help them to raise expenditure on social and educational purposes but also give their local funds greater leverage, as institutional shareholders, over the multinational corporations.

It might be objected that if the powerful Swedish Social Democrats and trade unions were defeated when they tried to introduce such a measure, why is there any reason to think that something similar could be achieved in the new Europe where labour is now much weaker? My answer would be that there are four reasons why the outcome could be different. Firstly, European corporations are not as tightly organised and cohesive as Sweden’s twenty families. Secondly, recent social mobilisations in Europe have been stronger and more persistent on pensions than any other issue. Thirdly, ruling parties have proved to be exceptionally vulnerable when they try to weaken and undermine social provision. Fourthly, it would be possible to frame the social fund proposals in ways that anticipate the sort of opposition that blocked advance in Sweden.

The share levy at ten per cent of profits would have the effect of diluting the value of all shares by about one per cent. Contrary to myth, individual shareholding is still confined to a small minority in Europe. Nevertheless bona fide pension funds also hold shares and it might be claimed that they would lose out. Most would be likely to gain more than they lost by the levy – if there was any doubt about this, they could be directly compensated by an allocation from the social funds.

The ownership of shares is still very unequal so the levy would work like a wealth tax. Unlike other attempts to tax wealth the share levy would not fall on home ownership or small farms and businesses – to meet this problem wealth taxes invariably allow exemptions which turn into handy loop-holes and reduce the value of the revenue they raise. Other revenue sources which could be tapped



to boost social and educational expenditure would be a tax on increases in the value of commercial land and a tax on fossil fuels. Together these levies and taxes would ensure that corporations would help to finance the social fabric on which their operations entirely depend and to give all citizens a share in the fruits of economic advance.

The European Trade Union Confederation has long called for the setting up of a proper, continent-wide Social Fund, with resources which it could invest to generate productive employment and that could underwrite future welfare expenditure. In 1959, the then European Community established a European Investment Bank, which was meant to counter-balance the power of the central banks. With the scrapping of the 'growth and stability pact' there is more than ever a role for the European Investment Bank. Indeed, three Cambridge economists have argued that the European Investment Bank should be built up as a counter-weight to the European Central Bank.<sup>5</sup>

The social funds would also be as much about producing wealth as distributing it. In a continent where stock exchanges are already of greatly increased importance, the social funds could help to protect productive enterprises from 'financialisation', to promote socially responsible business objectives, and to assert a degree of popular control over the accumulation process. The network of pension funds would have significant power in corporate affairs, both because of their shares and their investment policies. The fund network would develop its own cadre of financial specialists and would have reason to assist the tax authorities to monitor and enforce fiscal regulations.<sup>6</sup>

But, it might be objected, is not a fund based on shares vulnerable to the inevitable swings of the market? Dividend income is, in fact, much less volatile than share price, and the networks would count on dividends not share sales for their income. The pension fund network would be encouraged to use dividend revenue to buy corporate and public bonds to diversify their holdings. The network would also have to offer unquoted private companies the option of contributing bonds rather than shares. The networks would be barred from selling the shares they hold – Meidner's approach to social provision is to follow the method of 'de-commodification', in this case means of production. The social fund would, in the first instance, concentrate on building up resources for the future to pay for the sharp increase in social expenditure that will be required by two fundamental processes – the ageing of the population and the increasing need for further education and lifelong learning.

In the end, of course, the social expenditure of the future will have to be paid out of the production of the future, and this means that some future incomes will have to be allocated to this purpose. The share levy approach ensures that *rentier* incomes – returns to capital – will be diverted from wealthy individuals to the network of social funds.

Europe would, of course, be better able to dedicate itself to saving and improving its welfare arrangements and educational provision if it does not allow itself to be dragged into US military exploits. Washington's bellicosity is itself



prompted by the desire to distract US citizens from grave social problems, and ballooning inequality, at home. Europe should aspire to a quite different model, both for its own people and in its relations with the rest of the world. Developing some welfare ties at a continental level, binding together old and new members, would help to build the sense of common citizenship which might underpin an independent and progressive foreign policy.

### Notes

- 1 *Wall Street Journal*, 23 July, 2004.
- 2 Robin Blackburn, 'Eurodenial', *New Left Review*, No 18, November-December 2003; see also Andrea Boltho, 'What's Wrong with Europe?', *New Left Review*, No 22, July-August 2003
- 3 The original plan is set out in Rudolf Meidner, *Employee Investment Funds*, London 1978. For an account of the struggles over its implementation see Jonas Pontusson, 'Sweden: the People's Home in Danger', in Perry Anderson and Patrick Camiller, eds. *Mapping the Left In Western Europe*, London 1994.
- 4 James K. Galbraith, Pedro Conceicao and Pedro Ferreira, 'Inequality and Unemployment in Europe', *New Left Review*, Sept-Oct 1999.
- 5 Philip Arestis, Kevin McCauley and Malcolm Sawyer, 'An Alternative Stability Pact for the European Union', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol 25, no 1, 2001.
- 6 Though multinationals have many ways of evading tax through the use of transfer pricing, and the manipulation of allowances, the fiscal authorities, if properly supported by legislators, are far from powerless. For example, they can combat the siphoning off of profits as interest on intra-group loans – 'thin capitalisation' – by using operating profit as the basis for their calculations. See the interesting – if over-optimistic – report by Michael P. Devereux, Rachel Griffith, and Alexander Klemm, 'Why Has the UK Corporation Tax Raised So much Revenue?', Institute of Fiscal Studies, London, February 2004. I look at other technical aspects of 'Meidner-style' levies, including the likely yield, in 'The Pension Gap and How to Fix It', *Challenge*, September-October 2004 and 'How to Rescue a Failing Pension System: the British Case', in *New Political Economy*, December 2004.

# The Social State in Europe

## Eight theses

*André Brie MEP*

*The author is a well-known member of the European Parliament who represents the Party of Democratic Socialism in Germany. This article forms part of a longer essay on European Social Policy by Dr. Brie, published in the Socialist Renewal series by Spokesman Books (see [www.spokesmanbooks.com](http://www.spokesmanbooks.com)).*

The Keynesian welfare state has been under constant fire since the end of the 1970s. Up until the 1990s, the prevailing pattern was to shrink the social safety net within the established system by cuts in unemployment benefit, pensions, the health service, and the like. Since the mid-1990s, the policy of cuts has been combined with a ‘systemic reordering’: the partial privatisation of pension systems; the primacy of personal self-provision; restructuring labour market policy in accordance with the philosophy of workfare; the creation of competitively organised educational, post-graduate training, and health markets. It seems that the Keynesian welfare state, in this way, will disappear sooner or later, and yield its place to a competition-oriented market.

The political left in Europe vacillates mainly between the option of an ‘adaptation of the social state to the conditions of globalisation’ and the ‘defence of the achieved’. It tends to be minorities who want to put the social state on a new foundation – in Germany, the pertinent keywords are ‘value creation tax’, ‘citizen and gainfully employed insurance’, ‘social basic insurance’, and so on.<sup>1</sup> Broad, defensive mass protests by trade unions and social movements in Europe including general strikes (Greece 2001, Italy 1994/95, 2002/03, Spain and Portugal 2002, Austria and France 2003, Germany 2003 and 2004) have been able, at times, to delay the continuous social demolition and the liberalisation and privatisation of public goods in the member states of the European Union, but not to stop it. From defence and protest to an alternative is, apparently, a long and arduous endeavour. Nevertheless, we cannot avoid asking ourselves the question: what has to be changed in order to maintain and renew the social state?

### Thesis 1

The ‘social state class compromise’ has only modified the basic asymmetrical distribution of power between capital and labour, it has not

structurally dissolved it. The compromise functioned under the good weather conditions of the long post-war upswing, until the beginning of the 1970s, but only as long as high growth rates offered the basis for distributing the increases in output. Thus, in a somewhat abbreviated manner, ran the core of the thesis of *social state illusion*. According to this argument, a fundamental systemic transformation to a socialist society is the only way that holds the long-term promise of overcoming this power asymmetry, and the harmful social consequences linked to it. A mere concentration on ‘just compensation’ and the transformation of secondary distribution by way of social state instruments promises no permanently stable solution in the interest of the great majority of the population dependent on gainful employment.

This position can call upon Karl Marx: ‘If the material conditions of production are the cooperative property of the workers themselves, there also results a distribution of means of consumption different from the one prevailing today. Vulgar socialism (and in turn as part of democracy) took over from the bourgeois economists the observation and treatment of distribution as independent of the mode of production and the presentation of socialism, as if it turned mainly around the question of distribution.’ (Marx: *Critique of the Gotha Programme*).<sup>2</sup>

If, together with Marx, we ask ourselves a question about the ‘socialist way of production’ which, among other things, would rely on a democratic socialisation of the means of production, and would include the moment when we ‘produce differently, live differently’ – what concretely would we have to imagine? As we know, Marx and Engels shirked this question, because it contradicted their idea of ‘scientific socialism’. Instead, they criticised the ‘sectarians’ and ‘Utopians’ who imagined another society concretely as unscientific dreamers and handicraft modellers, far removed from reality. Only a field of ruins remains of the ‘real socialism’ of the Soviet period. Economically, it was not fit for survival; nor was it especially emancipating in socio-political terms. The assumption that a liberated society would result immediately from overcoming capitalist property relations in a certain way (state ownership of the means of production) has proved to be too simplistic. For the rest, there is at this point no developed debate about alternative visions of a socialist society, not even about the old social-democratic demand for ‘economic democracy’. What follows practically, therefore, from the call for a ‘socialist alternative’, which springs from the thesis of ‘social state illusion’?

To start with, there is not even a well anchored ‘theory construction site’. The anti-globalisation movement is only just starting to think about concepts such as global public goods, new property forms in the ‘knowledge society’ (free software, ‘copyleft’), about participative budgets, and the strengthening of communal democracy (‘reclaiming the state’). Usually it does this in a framework which is quite clearly oriented towards ‘reform’ in the Keynesian sense. Small circles of leftist intellectuals belabour questions of ‘market socialism’ or ‘participative planning’ at a high level of abstraction. One can learn

quite a few things from such sources, but the debate is at best just starting. It is still far from offering more concrete projects for political and economic strategies, whether in the sense of ‘market socialism’ or a ‘participative economy’ (parecon). To develop these approaches further and make them fit for ‘daily life’ will probably take a long time, and require public and political resonance. This would be part of a serious debate about the future of the social state and conceptions of a ‘socialist social state’.<sup>3</sup>

But let us not think that the social state is now a ‘mere illusion’. Even in Britain, after the deep cuts of the neo-liberal revolution under Margaret Thatcher, social provision still accounts for about 27% of gross domestic product, which is close to the European Union average. It cannot be killed off as quickly as many right-wing ideologues would wish. Apparently, once a particular course of social development has been taken, it cannot easily be erased. Without the instruments of the Keynesian welfare state, now in the process of being demolished, the social reality and the crisis in Europe would look much more brutal than they currently do. Even though only the secondary distribution has been touched by it, it is an achievement to be defended, and a point of departure for more.

## **Thesis 2**

In 1952, Gerhard Mackenroth, the theoretician of the social state, formulated a fundamental insight: ‘that all social expense must always be covered from the popular income of the *current period*.’ Whether social protection, social insurance, universal social basic insurance, capital-covered or tax-based mechanism – the sentence holds for everything in equal measure: ‘there is no accumulation of funds, no transfer of shares of income as a source of social expense... The problem of national economics cannot be solved or pushed aside by acting according to the principles of an ordinary businessman and insuring private risks. At the national economic level, there does not exist an accumulation of consumption funds which can be consumed when needed, and which can then, in a way, be a welcome addition to the popular income of a later period.’

The financial markets are in no way a miracle weapon for ‘saving the social system’, as many politician and economists want us to believe. The system of capital coverage is dependent on a permanent rise in productivity and, for example, on financing consumption in old age by restraining the gainfully employed from immediate consumption (thus, on saving).

Individuals may put aside money for tomorrow by saving today. A national economy as a whole cannot do that. It can guarantee social consumption in the future only by real physical and social investment today. The return on a pension fund or life insurance has to be produced in the current period. If this is not possible, the expected increase in value is lost.

Nor does international trade with obligations (for example, pension funds) solve this basic problem. This is because the capital that flows in from abroad (through the purchase of ‘German’ or ‘European’ securities) has first to be

produced, and is subtracted from the gross domestic product of these countries. This also holds the other way around – one should only think of the glorious idea that European pension funds should invest in Chinese stocks and bonds and the Chinese workers are then supposed to produce ‘our pensions’. Whichever way one turns it, one economic truism always holds: *There is no such thing as a free lunch!*

Before it is simply claimed that ‘we’ can no longer afford the social state, two questions pose themselves:

- How is the popular income currently *produced*? (Karl Marx’s core question) and
- How is it *distributed* (the equally justified core question of the old social-democratic workers’ movement), so that sufficient social expenditure in the current period can be served out of it?

The economy of Europe no longer grows as rapidly as it did in the 1950s and 1960s, but it is still growing. If we ‘save’ on social expenditures under these conditions, other social groups may receive a larger share of the national income.

### Thesis 3

Many look at the controversy about the social state almost exclusively from the point of view of ‘social justice’. This is surely important. At first, however, we have to remember ‘*It’s the economy, stupid!*’ In times of high mass unemployment, there is the need first to try to come to terms with the *political economy of the social state*.

Heiner Flassbeck has pronounced a truth at first bitter for the left: ‘The conflict over justice, the social safety net and solidarity in society is completely meaningless in times of high and rising unemployment. In such times, any measure that creates 100,000 jobs is considered just; any renunciation of wages, social protection or insurance protection which brings others wages and bread, as solidarity-inspired to the highest degree.’<sup>4</sup>

It is, after all, not an accident that in the last 25 years large parts of the trade unions also believed the general propaganda that every one had to ‘tighten their belts’ and save from the point of view of the trade unions ‘in a socially just way’, so that the entrepreneurs, the high income earners, and wealth holders were also just a little bit fleeced. The background to this is the static and continuously high mass unemployment, which apparently cannot be addressed. It can hardly come any better for the executioners of the social state: the general logic of austerity and an apparently necessary flexibility is widely accepted. The dispute is no longer about the economy, but about who, in the name of ‘solidarity’, has to make what contribution to the general ‘saving’.

From the economic point of view, however, the following question has to be asked: when the state as well as private households both restrain their expenditures, in other words ‘save’, how then should the entrepreneurs (quite independently of who owns them) expand sales and be able again to invest more? If some entrepreneurs now try to improve their situation by constant ‘cost

reductions' (of wages, wage supplements, and so on), they will only worsen the position of other entrepreneurs and the demand potential of other households. In the round that then follows, the state has less tax income and higher expenditures, because there are more unemployed people. Nothing comes of the envisaged budgetary consolidation and the debt reduction – new holes have to be mended. This cycle is known as the 'debt paradox'. From the point of view of the whole economy, this policy, socially as well as economically, leads to a downward spiral in which, in the end, everybody loses. It is not only socially unjust but also wrong, precisely from the point of view of economic policy. Current popular income stays far below what it could be, and what could be achieved by way of *another economic and financial policy*.

### **Thesis 4**

Keynes clearly pointed to the connections between the economy, distribution, the social state and developed strategies, and how they can be worked to achieve durable 'well-being for all'. In his conception, the social and welfare state was embedded in an expansive macroeconomic policy for full employment, state investment guidance, control of the financial markets, curbing of speculation and a more balanced distribution of income and wealth.

Against this argument, it is today held that such a policy would only have any chance at all under conditions of closed national economies, not under those of 'globalisation'. A series of emerging industrial economies have pursued a more strongly domestically-oriented strategy (for example, Thailand, Malaysia, China, and Argentina after the crash). They have at least shown that they are able to achieve better economic results than those applying the neo-liberal mantras of structural adaptation.<sup>5</sup> For Europe within the European Union, another argument is much more decisive: 'since less than 10% of the gross domestic product of the European Union is exported to non-EU countries, it is no exaggeration to characterise the European Union as a closed economy.' (Kleinknecht/Wengel 1998, p. 641). The medium and small European national state may have become too small to deal with the economic problems, but the European Union as a whole is not.

This also means that social, tax and environmental standards can be regulated at a European level, and thus be withdrawn from global competition. A co-ordinated European tax and financial policy for solid and distributively just financing of the social tasks of the member states, co-ordinated economic policy for strengthened public investments in social infrastructure and environmental structural change, co-ordinated monetary and budgetary policy for the strengthening of the European domestic economy, and the environmentally sound revival of domestic demand — all this can be worth it and lead to full employment.<sup>6</sup> The social state in Europe can thus be maintained and renewed.

Ecologists criticise Keynes' strategy as fixated upon growth. High economic growth increases environmental problems because of the greater consumption of energy and raw materials. This criticism of Keynes, however, is only partly

justified: ‘The Keynesian long-term strategy (Keynes, 1943), which prognosticated lessening growth (stagnation) for the highly developed national economies, such that it would no longer be possible to achieve full employment on the traditional way of high growth rates, thus then also did not usher in a elaborate new edition of growth stimulating politics, but Keynes recommended already more than half a century ago in the middle of the Second World War (1943!) step-wise reductions in labour time. The argument for this way back to full employment is also supported by the most recent ecological problem discussion: ultimately, any kind of growth harms the economy, so that also in the future, it will be necessary to solve the employment and social problems also without (high) economic growth rates.’ (Karl Georg Zinn 2003).

Zinn’s proposal of a ‘qualitative Keynesianism’, at least as a transitional programme in the medium term (20 to 30 years), has some plausibility. In common with Marx and political ecology, it places the changing of ‘the exchange of materials with nature’ in the foreground: ecological and social restructuring for a sustainable development. At the margins of the trade union and environmental movement, there has already developed a basic framework for a comprehensive, sustainable strategy. The recommended individual tools certainly require discussion, but the fundamental logic of alternative development points in the correct direction.

Ecological innovation on a broad front leads to a multitude of new products and services: solar-hydrogen-economy, fuel cells, drastic energy and resource saving, ecological farming, plant-based chemistry, bionics, ethno-botany, green information technology, mobility and energy services. It will take a while, until new satisfaction levels are reached in this way. Environmental innovation is closely linked with social innovation: eco-efficient services, the extension of social and cultural services, social citizenship rights, rights of economic democracy, education and qualification, a new working-time standard, and ‘Useful Work’. The return to high growth rates is not at the centre: rather, a far-reaching dematerialisation of the economy, and the targeted improvement of the living conditions of the majority of the population.

Qualitative Keynesianism thus promotes lasting, ecologically sound and just well-being for all. It is fully compatible with far-reaching eco-socialist conceptions. And it creates an economic environment in which a social state that has been renewed on the basis of solidarity can be embedded.

## **Thesis 5**

Then there is the question of the ‘demographic challenge’. On present trends, by the year 2050, the proportion of people in Europe who are aged over 65 will have doubled; after that the population will begin to shrink significantly. This is seen only as a cost problem. The demographic changes will be met by cuts in pensions and health systems, and the instruction to make ‘more private provision’.

But the ‘cost problem’ of an ageing and shrinking population can be met comparatively easily. By maintaining the average growth in productivity of the



past 100 years, Europe will be in a position to sustain welfare even with a shrinking proportion of the population gainfully employed, and so guarantee adequate material security for both young and old equally. There is no doubt that the tax and contribution basis for financing social security systems for the elderly has to be broadened, and income and wealth differentials have to be reduced more sharply.

The political mainstream, however, does not ask the really important questions: how do work and living conditions have to be changed so that people can stay healthy and happy in gainful employment, and can remain so when they reach retirement age? Which social, educational and other infrastructures are needed in a society where the proportion of elderly and older people continues to increase over several decades? And how should the life conditions of children and young people be designed, so that they can develop in an all-round way?

For the future, we must seek deceleration, sufficiency, distributive justice, health promotion and individual freedom, instead of more inequality, market constraint, ever more stress, and entrepreneurial 'flexibility'. The solution to the demographic question requires more social provision and a better social state, in parallel to the necessary changes in work and economic life.

## Thesis 6

In light of the diversity of welfare state traditions in the European Union, the debate about a renewal of the social state in Europe can be maintained only at the level of guiding images and functions, which the social security systems are thus supposed to fulfil.

Socialist policy stands for a social state that guarantees social citizenship rights materially by way of universal and unconditional services in the framework of a public all-encompassing insurance.<sup>7</sup> Health, education, protection against social risks, and so on have to be considered as *public goods*, which should be withdrawn from market compulsion and market forces. From there, as a guiding vision for the renewal of the social security systems, there follows the concept of a people's or citizens' insurance. Contribution requirements (whether as taxes or social contributions) and claims for services tie in with *inhabitant status*, and no longer exclusively with gainful employment, as was the case in the conservative-corporatist welfare state.

The financing of the tasks of the social state is to be borne by all inhabitants (female and male) and businesses according to their financial capability. Thus, the basis of contribution will be broadened, and the principle of solidarity-based redistribution strengthened. There exists a considerable spectrum of proposals on how this general guiding image is to be implemented concretely. In the context of the German Federal Republic, some propose to finance social security generally by way of a value-creation tax. Thus, part of the value created would be taken out of the conflict over primary distribution (between capital and labour) and reserved exclusively to finance social-state tasks. Others envisage replacing the employers' contribution to social insurance by a value-creation tax.



Still others want to extend the contribution base of the social security system (for example, to self-employed people, civil servants, housewives, and so on), as well as with respect to the inclusion of other kinds of income (for example, rent, interest and capital returns). In this context, reference is often made to already existing national state models of a 'citizen insurance' (for example, health insurance in Austria, pension insurance in Switzerland). The strengths and weaknesses as well as the consequences of the respective 'models' are tied predominantly to the national context, and should be evaluated in this framework. They all have in common that they imply a completely different direction for social state renewal than the 'social reforms' now being implemented in the member states, and the current socio-political guiding vision at the level of the European Union.

Socialist politics strives for comprehensive equality between women and men. At odds with this are the social concepts of normality, which are imbued with the patriarchal image of the male head of the household and which still characterise most social states in the European Union. The renewal of the social state has to overcome the multiple disadvantages of women and insist on egalitarian patterns of gainful employment: equal payment for work of equal value, equal career opportunities, shorter work times and access to protected part-time work for both sexes. Independent tax and social systems can be taken up on this basis; that is, the abolition of the social and tax policy privileges of the 'housewife marriage' and the 'marital partnership'. Whether people live together with or without a marriage certificate is their affair. The tax and social system should not favour one or the other arrangement.

Thus, the advantages enjoyed by the married couple have to be completely removed from family policy. There remains the simple sentence: family is where there are children. In this respect, the renewal of the social state has to be above all service-oriented: an area-wide extension of public child-care centres, which makes possible the compatibility of family and profession. A targeted financial support of households with children ('family burden compensation') is to be borne in solidarity by the whole community, in the form of tax-financed basic child allowances.

Socialist policy strives for basic social security, which prevents poverty and enables equal participation in social well-being (participative justice). Security in old age is to be achieved by solidarity-based, redistributive public systems. It must fulfil two functions: basic social security in old age (as basic security for all) and maintenance of adequate living standards (performance justice). Periods of child-rearing, caring for elderly relatives, and basic and post-graduate training, as well as phases of unemployment and sickness have to be adequately taken into account. The health system including long-term care has to be financed on the basis of solidarity (an income-proportional and thereby redistributive contribution assessment), and must provide qualitatively high-level services to all independent of their income. A 'citizen insurance system' in this context allows a more targeted prevention policy (and thereby opens considerable cost-

reduction potentials) than a market-economy dismembered health system. Unemployment support has to remain an unconditional social legal claim, guarantee freedom of choice of occupation, and uphold and renew already acquired qualifications.

The repair of all three pillars of social protection — care for the elderly, health care, and gainful employment — requires a new policy of full employment and social redistribution (compare Thesis 4). Without this, an egalitarian renewal of the social state will not succeed.

### **Thesis 7**

In the European Union, the social state is primarily developed at the level of the national state, and this in very different ways. In accordance with the dogma of strengthening ‘competitiveness’, a harsh regime of competition between the national social states has been established. The member states are constantly tempted to achieve a competitive edge by demolishing social benefits. Thus, the question at the European level is, first of all, to prevent increased social dumping in the extended European Union.

Agreement on a social stability pact is necessary to achieve this goal. This builds on the simple fact that there exists a very close connection between the economic development of a country (measured as gross domestic product per head), and its social performance quota (the share of all social expenditure in gross domestic product).

In the framework of a social stability pact, the social performance quotas of the 25 European Union member states would first be recorded and countries with similar quotas put together in a group (‘corridor’). A downward departure from the initial value would entail a consultation procedure for the countries concerned and, if necessary, sanctions. In this way, social development would be coupled to economic development. The more weakly developed national economies in the European Union would not be over-taxed by this form of social policy regulation. The more they gained in economic development, the more their social performance quotas would approach those in the rest of the European Union. The economically stronger member countries would thus have their way barred to social dumping (under average social benefit quotas in relation to their income level).

The European Union can and must do considerably more than just prevent social dumping. In the future it must set binding, quantitative and qualitative social policy tasks: for example, for the improvement of health insurance, for the minimal level of social protection, for European minimum wage standards, for overcoming poverty, social exclusion, homelessness and illiteracy. It has to be possible, within this framework, to commit the member states to concrete programmes whose implementation will be continually analysed and controlled. The European Union can supplement these programmes by European promotion. Thus, European social policy would begin to have an independent effect, beyond merely gathering information, agreeing indicators and comparing ‘best practices’.

In the perspective of social policy, there is also the question of the ‘finality of European integration’ – towards which goal should it ultimately strive? Within the framework of a federal or confederated European Union, don’t we also need a European social union (‘Social State European Union’), as was demanded by the anti-fascist movements in Europe after the Second World War? Is it sensible to lay down, at the European level, unified norms for standards of service, levels of benefits, and additional entitlements, as well as adaptations of rules? Core ingredients of social security, for example, might be basic social security, old age and invalidity pensions, unemployment support, family benefits, and health services. In this way, the manifold practical problems that have until now beset the ‘coordination of social protection systems’ in the areas of free mobility and freedom of residence of persons, would resolve themselves.

The key to such a solution lies in choosing relative reference parameters: for example, as far as a European basic social security is concerned, there should be a benefit level of 60% of the national average income of the member state, in which a person chooses to reside. Thus, there would be no incentive to ‘social tourism’ – for example, by taking along the relatively generous basic social protection provided in the Netherlands when settling in regions with low living costs such as Apulia or Extremadura if, for instance, the national state social insurance were to be made ‘transportable’ all over Europe. The economic performance of the respective member state of residence would be duly taken into account by the choice of relative reference parameters.

Today, this debate still sounds like the distant music of the future. But if one wants to prevent the increased ‘Europe-wide patient mobility’ that is presently being discussed and opens the way to a European Union domestic market in health services, which would gradually undermine the solidarity-based health systems of the national states that have already been severely hit by the recent ‘health reforms’, then one also has to think about European solutions.

## **Thesis 8**

What are the social and political forces that can produce a dynamic in the direction of a social Europe?

Under present conditions, these are still relative minorities: they are the trade unions, acting up now mainly at the level of the nation state, which are opposed to social demolition; the social movements coming together in the European Social Forum (ESF), voluntary organisations and initiatives: and the European left-wing parties as well as minority tendencies in the European Greens and Social Democrats.

The European Social Forum undoubtedly makes an important contribution to creating a European democratic political public – alongside the formations of European political parties and foundations as well as existing European associations and networks. With the European days of action by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the social movements on April 2 and 3, 2004, perhaps a beginning was made to going beyond resistance to social state

demolition at the national state level to a discussion about a common European perspective and capability for action.

In this respect, nobody should be taken in by the illusion that it might be possible to compensate, at a European level, for defeats at the local, regional or national levels. The fight for a social Europe must rather be viewed as an initiative within a political system of several levels. In this respect, the social state, public services, and existing public provision can be defended at the local, regional and national levels. But if it is not possible to back up this policy with a European dimension (the social stability pact, Social Union), these efforts are always structurally on the defensive. The European Union's economic policy, its growth and stability pact, and its policy of deregulation in the domestic market all continuously erode progress. Without the perspective of a turn in this developmental logic also at the European level, these struggles remain precarious and incomplete.

If we succeed in building up a European dimension of resistance against the demolition of the social state, this in turn can have positive feedback for the activities in the same direction at the national, regional and local levels. After all, nothing is more inspiring than to discover common concerns with a multitude of sympathetic minds and to see one's own activities reinforced and supported by those of others. In the present phase, the issue will mainly be whether, by common European discussion and activities, a minimum consensus can emerge between the participants concerning core elements in the renewal of the social state, which then develops persuasive influence on social majorities. When the widespread belief that 'there is no alternative' is for the first time seriously challenged, then it will become possible to gradually overcome the present defensive situation.

*Translated by Carla Krüger*

*References available on request to [elfeuro@compuserve.com](mailto:elfeuro@compuserve.com)*

## Notes

- 1 Concerning the concept of financing social insurance by way of a value creation tax in Germany, compare Christen/Kahrs/Weise 2000. The concepts of the German green and alternative Left, from the 1980s and 1990s, concerning the 'citizens and gainfully employed insurance' and the 'social basic insurance' have received a radical reinterpretation in the Agenda 2010 and the Rürup Commission. Compare Bartelheimer 2003 and Kreuz 2003.
- 2 Marx by the way even declined to speak about a 'social question', which lies at the basis of the later discourse about the social state: 'In the stead of the existing class struggle, there enters a newspaper writer phrase – the "social question", whose "solution" one "prepares the ground for". Instead of from the revolutionary transformation process of society the "socialist organisation of total labour" "emerges" from the "state help" that the state gives to productive cooperatives, which IT, not the worker, "calls into being". This is worthy of the imagination of Lassalle that one can with state obligations build a new society just as well as a new railroad!' (Marx: *Critique of the Gotha Programme*)
- 3 Marx has addressed the latter question in the criticism of the Gotha Programme. He

- referred to the fact that from the ‘products of labour’ there after all also had to be formed ‘funds for those incapable of working’, for ‘common needs’ such as schools and health institutions as well as ‘insurance against accidents and disturbances’.
- 4 Flassbeck, Heiner (2003): *Wie Deutschland wirtschaftlich ruiniert wurde*, Ein Bericht aus dem Jahr 2010 (How Germany was ruined economically, A Report from the year 2010), in: *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 8/2003, pp. 955-965.
  - 5 My reference pertains not only to the quantitative economic results (increase in the GDP and the national popular income), with which the mainstream economists are after all mainly concerned in their argumentation. That the social position of people, the income distribution, the income pollution etc. in these countries are anything else but desirable, stands on another leaf, and this can also only be changed by different social relationships of forces and corresponding political conceptions in these countries themselves.
  - 6 More concrete proposals for such policies I have submitted some time ago (compare Brie/Dräger 2001, Brie 2002). Much of it can also be found in the programme of the PDS for the European elections.
  - 7 The same is also claimed by the Scandinavian social-democratic welfare state model; yet, social democracy in Sweden has also introduced its reconstruction. However, it should still be stressed that the Scandinavian model in the EU comparison economically as well as socially still reaches better results than the others (comp. Corsi/Orsini 2001).



These days every thing about you seems to be defined by: Lifestyle; the perfume you wear, the clothes you buy, where you shop. It's not a great way to define ourselves.

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# Empire in Africa

*Michael Barratt Brown*

*Michael Barratt Brown is the author of Africa's Choices (Penguin Books). This article is based on a paper prepared for the Boston Social Forum, which met in July 2004.*

Governments in the United States, Britain and France have recently been showing a new interest in the African continent. Mr Bush, Mr Blair and M.Chirac have all made visits to African countries within the last two years. Mr Blair made much of his concern for Africa's problems in his speech to the Labour Party Conference in 2002, and has recently spoken in favour of military intervention in the Sudan.

Nobody intervened in the genocide in Rwanda. Why in the Sudan? Was it possible that this was a belated recognition of the crisis of Africa's indebtedness to Western banks, further instigated by horror at the humanitarian disasters in Rwanda as in Sierra Leone, the Congo and most recently in Ethiopia? Might something be done to help to treat the AIDS epidemic, cancel the debts and establish fairer trading relations between the rich developed countries' consumers and Africa's poorest producers. I doubt it. Sudan has the most recently developed oil production in Africa piped out to Port Sudan. Controlling the government of Sudan becomes a crucial interest of the great powers, not least of the Americans, because it is the French and the Chinese who have major interests in developing Sudanese oil.

It has become increasingly clear – and a recent article in *Le Monde Diplomatique*\* has spelt out the horrid truth – that the real aim of western Governments is to align African governments with new imperial policies and, in particular, to establish control over Africa's rich mineral resources – and all this done in the name of the battle against terrorism. This has, of course, been a real issue since the 1998 attacks claimed for Al Qaeda on US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, to which the most inappropriate bombing of a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan was Clinton's response. The failure of US intervention in Somalia is not forgotten. Since 1997, quite large scale US military assistance and training

schemes have been launched in Algeria, Morocco, Chad, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Egypt and Kenya, with a naval presence in the Gulf of Guinea and the Red Sea, and a base proposed in Sao Tomé. In the years 1998-2002, Egypt was the largest recipient of US arms, larger even than Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Already in the mid 1990s, the US State Department created an African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) to provide training for peace-keeping and humanitarian aid, in effect to modernise local armed forces and equip them with American arms to respond to emerging terrorism. ACRI's coordinator is Col. Nestor Pino-Marina, a Cuban exile, who took part in the failed US landing in the Bay of Pigs in 1961, in the Vietnam campaign and in clandestine operations with the Contras in Nicaragua in the 1990s. Between 1997 and 2000, ACRI organised training for local army battalions in Senegal, Uganda, Malawi, Mali, Ghana, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire. According to Colonel Nestor Pino-Marina, 'accepted doctrine commonly used in Nato is being absorbed'. Following upon the events of 9/11, the Bush government acted. In spring 2002, ACRI was reorganised by the Pentagon into ACOTA – African Contingency Operations Training Assistance – and offensive training was added to training for peace-keeping and humanitarian aid. In May 2003, Mali hosted a seminar on combating terrorism in the region, attended by delegates from Algeria, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal, and also by representatives from Germany and France.

Two months later in July 2003, President Bush, in his first foray outside of America, made an African tour comprising visits to Senegal, Nigeria, Botswana, Uganda and South Africa. His message was that 'we will not allow terrorists to threaten African people, or to use Africa as a base to threaten the world'. Besides ACOTA, 44 African countries have been taking part in a programme organised by the Pentagon especially for officers (International Military Education and Training – IMET), at a cost of \$11 million in 2003. Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa have been involved. ACOTA is linked to the training centres of the Joint Arms Training System (JCATS), run by Military Professional Resources Inc (MPRI), which uses sophisticated software to mimic battle conditions. Colonel Victor Nelson, a former US military attaché to Nigeria, who runs the Sahel initiative, claims that this is an inexpensive way of providing officer training. Nigeria is the first African country to have such a centre at Abuja.

All this activity led up to a meeting on March 23-24, 2004 at the US European Command (US-Eucom) headquarters at Stuttgart in Germany. Chiefs of Staff took part from Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Senegal and Tunisia. Defence against terrorists who might attack the oil fields of North Africa and those of the Gulf of Guinea was the subject of the meeting. One particular group accused of terrorist activity in the region of the Sahel, between the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa, is the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). It is suspected of having links with Al Qaeda. Colonel



Nelson, who oversees the programme of the US Defense Department's Office of International Security Affairs (PSI), explained that the 'PSI was an important tool in the war on terrorism and has gone a long way to open doors and establish relationships notably between Algeria, Mali, Niger and Chad...If you squeeze the terrorists in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and other places, they will find new places to operate, and one of those places is the Sahel/Maghreb'.

This is a region which has historically been under French influence. The people speak French and France still has military bases in one-time French colonies – Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, Central African Republic, Gabon, Madagascar, Mauritius and Djibouti. Increasing US interest might be expected to cause some friction, especially in Djibouti, where the United States now has a permanent base near to the French base. This tiny state on the edge of a desert, one of the poorest places in the world, happens to be across from the maritime zone where a quarter of the world's oil passes through, and therefore of great strategic importance, which has been enhanced by the development of oil production in the Sudan and the use of Port Sudan just up the coast from Djibouti. General Charles Wald, the US-Eucom deputy commander, who travelled in March 2004 to Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Angola, South Africa, Namibia, Gabon, Sao Tomé, Ghana, Niger and Tunisia, commented that 'the US and France had many common interests.'

Their chief common interest is oil. Much of Africa's oil lies in or under or off shore from what were once French colonies – Algeria, Morocco, Gabon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroun. French companies alongside of US and British companies operate concessions.

African oil has become increasingly important in the last decades and now ranks second only to the Middle East, supplying about 15% of the world's oil (see Appendix). Troubles in the Middle East and the declining reserves in the United States and in Europe have given to these African reserves their especial importance. Establishing and maintaining imperial interests have become essential once more. Oil pipelines and installations are prime targets for terrorist attack. Their protection cannot be left to corrupt and ill-prepared local élites.

In the arms for oil business there is a symbiosis between the giant arms companies of the United States and the United Kingdom and the giant oil companies. Protecting their oil fields from sabotage requires the importation of arms by the oil producers. The sale of arms is most easily financed by payment with oil, sometimes even with barter deals. The chief recipients of international arms transfers are the oil producing states, Saudi Arabia in particular. Western governments have not been above selling arms simultaneously to warring oil producers, as in the case of the Iran-Iraq war, and of supporting with arms and then attacking an oil state, as in the case of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. There is much evidence to show that a small cabal in each western state is responsible for encouraging the arms for oil business.

African states suffer like other Developing Countries from their inheritance



of an artificial economy of trade relations established under colonial rule. In each colony production of two or three primary commodities was established for export to the colonial power, and in exchange manufactures were imported. Thus in the case of the oil producing countries, oil exports make up some 80% to 100% of all trade; in the case of the coffee, tea and cocoa producers dependency on these exports accounts for 50% to 60% of all trade; in the case of the cotton and tobacco producers the proportion ranges from 30% to 60%. The élites which rule in these countries are closely associated with the main export earning commodity. Control of mineral ore production through state ownership of plant and other operations gives the same privileges to a ruling élite in mineral producing countries. This makes African governments easily susceptible to the influence of the consumer countries, i.e. the ex-colonial powers, and in particular to the giant companies which buy the minerals. Selling arms and training armies has become part of the deal, which the United States and the one-time colonial powers negotiate.

There has recently been some recovery in world commodity prices – not only in oil prices as the result of the Iraq war, but also in the prices of mineral ores and metals. From a level of the upper 80s these rose to 100 in 1994 and 108 in 2003. The explanation appears to be large-scale Chinese buying. Africa is still a relatively small world producer of minerals (see Appendix). The exception lies in certain exotic ores. Zaire and Zambia have 50% of world cobalt reserves and South Africa and Zimbabwe some 90% of chrome reserves and South Africa has also 90% of the reserves of the platinum group of metals. These together with uranium in Namibia and gold and diamonds in southern Africa can well account for the renewed interest of the United States in this neglected and much damaged continent.

US interest in controlling the oil in Sudan is also driven by Chinese as well as French competition. We should not be fooled by the claims that rescuing Darfur with an all-African force is once more ‘humanitarian intervention’. Such a force will be under ultimate US command and using US arms, and having ‘absorbed Nato military doctrine’ with its command centre at Abuja, and protected from the military bases in Sao Tomé and Djibouti.

We have seen all this before. Intervention in Yugoslavia led to the establishment of the largest US military base outside the United States, Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo, just north of the Albanian port of Vlores. This just where it is planned for the proposed trans-Balkan pipeline through Bulgaria and Macedonia, both minions of the United States, to end, and give deep water anchorage for the very largest 300,000 tonne tankers, bringing oil from the newly developed oil fields entering the Black Sea for export to the United States.

*References available on request.*

\* *Le Monde Diplomatique*, English edition, 08.07.04, pp.8-9

## APPENDIX

### AFRICA'S SHARES OF WORLD MINERAL EXPORTS, 1970-2000 (all figures in \$billions)

#### *All Non-Fuel Minerals*

<i>Country</i>	<i>Commodities</i>	1970	1980	1990	2000
World	all non-fuel	23.5	96.8	126.9	176.3
S.Africa	gold, chrome, platinum	0.4	2.0	2.5	5.3
Developing Africa (as below)		2.6	6.5	6.2	3.8
Morocco	fertiliser	0.2	0.4	0.6	0.7
Zaire	copper, cobalt	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.2
Zambia	copper, cobalt	1.0	1.4	1.2	0.5
Guinea	bauxite	–	0.5	0.6	0.4
Niger	uranium	–	0.5	0.2	0.1
Zimbabwe	chrome, nickel	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2
Ghana	gold, aluminium				
	manganese	–	0.3	0.3	0.2
Liberia	iron ore	0.2	0.3	–	–
Namibia	uranium, silver, lead				
	diamonds	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.1
Botswana	diamonds	–	0.1	0.2	0.2

#### *Mineral fuels*

World	all fuel	28.2	482	370	661
S. Africa		0.1	1.0	1.5	2.0
Developing Africa		4.0	70.4	44.3	73.6
Nigeria		0.7	24.3	13.3	20.0
Algeria		0.1	15.4	10.5	21.1
Libya		2.3	21.9	10.7	13.2
Angola		–	1.5	3.7	7.1
Gabon		–	1.2	1.7	2.5
Congo		–	0.4	1.0	2.4
Egypt		–	2.0	0.8	1.7
Sudan		–	–	0.3	1.4
Cote d'Ivoire		–	–	0.4	0.7
Equit. Guinea		–	–	–	1.1
Cameroon		–	0.4	1.0	0.6
Morocco		–	–	0.2	0.3

Sources: *UNCTAD Commodity Yearbook, 2003*, Tables 1.10 and 1.12 and *UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics*, Table 4.20

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**DETENTION IN AFGHANISTAN AND GUANTANAMO BAY****Statement of Shafiq Rasul, Asif Iqbal and Rhuhel Ahmed**

*We referred to the cases of Feroz Abbasi and Moazzam Begg, two British citizens still detained at Guantanamo Bay, in Dark Times (Spokesman 81). Subsequently, Jamal al-Harith, another British citizen, shed some light on the conditions in the camps, and the practices and abuses there, when he was released in March 2004. This was prior to the circulation of the pictures of torture at Abu Ghraib in Iraq, in April 2004, which shocked the world.*

*Now there is a comprehensive statement entitled 'Detention in Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay', by Shafiq Rasul, Asif Iqbal and Rhuhel Ahmed, who all come from Tipton in the West Midlands of England. These three men were also released from Guantanamo in March. The Statement has been compiled with their lawyers, Birnberg Peirce & Partners, and was released in the United States on 4 August 2004. In the words of the introductory paragraphs, 'This statement jointly made by them constitutes an attempt to set out details of their treatment at the hands of UK and US military personnel and civilian authorities during the time of their detention in Kandahar in Afghanistan in late December 2001 and throughout their time in American custody in Guantanamo Bay Cuba. This statement is a composite of the experiences of all three. They are referred to throughout by their first names for brevity. There is far more that could be said by each, but that task is an open-ended one. They have tried to include the main features.'*

*We reprint below an excerpt from the closing section of the Statement that treats on 'the state of some other prisoners' who endured mistreatments of diverse kinds and are still held at Guantanamo. Currently 585 people remain there, including four Britons as well as four British residents. Campaigns for their release continue.*

*Shafiq Rasul, Asif Iqbal and Rhuhel Ahmed have set out the degradation they and their colleagues of many nationalities suffered: shackling in a bent position to a ring in the floor for hours or days, isolation for weeks or months, being held naked, kept in freezing air conditioning, sleep deprivation, near-starvation, imposed injections, forced shaving of hair and beard, withholding of family mail, refusal of medical attention, beatings, interrogations, psychological torture to*

*force false confessions or false testimony against others, being confronted with confessions they never made, sexual humiliation, being shown pornographic photos and videos.*

*They themselves had undergone extraordinary and terrifying experiences even before they arrived in Cuba. All three were detained in Northern Afghanistan in November 2001 by forces loyal to General Dostum, as their Statement reveals: 'According to information all three were given later, there were US forces present at the point they were packed into containers together with almost 200 others. Asif became unconscious and awoke to find that in an attempt to allow air into the containers Dostum's forces had fired machine guns into the sides of the containers. Asif was struck in the arm by a bullet as a result. The journey to Sherbegan took nearly 18 hours and the containers were not opened until they reached the prison. All three men remained in the containers amongst the dead and dying throughout this time. Asif reports that to get water he had to lick the side of the container or wipe a cloth on the top of the container where the condensation had collected and squeeze the drips of water into his mouth. On arrival at Sherbegan of the 200 originally in the container only 20 were alive, some of them seriously injured.' Some of the horrors of that transportation were also recorded by the film producer, Jamie Doran, in 'Massacre at Mazar' (see Spokesman 77).*

*Whilst at Sherbegan, the men were beaten. Two weeks later, Mr Iqbal and Mr Rasul were flown from Kandahar to Cuba, to be followed a month later by Mr Ahmed. Before their removal, they were hooded and forced to strip, then left naked and subjected to 'cavity' searches. On arrival in Cuba, they feared for their lives as guards told them 'Nobody knows you're here, all they know is that you're missing and we could kill you and no one would know.' Mr Iqbal believes the authorities deliberately fostered mental anguish – 'they had thought carefully about the best way to punish me and break me.'*

*'We had the impression that at the beginning things were not carefully planned, but a point came at which you could notice things changing. That appeared to be after Gen Miller [arrived] around the end of 2002,' said Mr Rasul. 'That is when short-shackling [when detainees are chained into a squatting position] started, loud music playing in interrogation, shaving beards and hair, putting people in cells naked, taking away people's 'comfort' items [eg towels] ... moving some people every two hours, depriving them of sleep, the use of a/c [air-conditioned, cold] air. Before, when people would be put into blocks for isolation, they would seem to stay for not more than a month. After he came, people would be kept there for months and months and months.'*

*British officials made repeated visits to Guantanamo to question Britons who had been subjected to ill-treatment by US personnel. Consular officials, who visited at least six times, were supposed to ensure the welfare of the Britons, yet they were always accompanied by MI5 officers. Mr Iqbal says that the embassy official once acted like 'a third interrogator', asking him not about his welfare, but about other matters. British officials saw all three men within three days of*

*their arrival in Cuba. Mr Rasul says he was interviewed under armed guard by someone who said he was from the British embassy in Washington and someone from MI5. He said: 'The MI5 officer told me in no uncertain terms that if I did not cooperate they could make life very difficult for me.' He was told if he admitted going to Afghanistan for jihad, he could return to England. Mr Rasul says he was interviewed twice by MI5 in Camp X-ray, and Mr Ahmed once. Mr Iqbal says British intelligence questioned him four times over three months. His first interrogation by MI5 lasted between six and eight hours. Mr Iqbal 'remembers clearly' that, on one occasion, the official wrote down his list of grievances for the first time. These included infections he was suffering from untreated wounds caused by iron leg shackles; being led naked to and from the showers; poor food; disrespect shown to their religion; and sleep deprivation. The complaint ran to two pages. Mr Rasul says he complained to a British embassy official called Martin, telling him that he had been kept in isolation for three months. Again, nothing seemed to happen. The report concludes: 'It was very clear to all three that MI5 was content to benefit from the effect of the isolation, sleep deprivation and other forms of acutely painful and degrading treatment, including short shackling.'*

*Lawyer Gareth Peirce said the report showed Britain's complicity in the human rights abuses at Guantanamo. As she told The Guardian, 'The [British government] attitude displayed the hypocrisy of the public face in the UK saying we're doing all we can and the private face there in Guantanamo involved up to their elbows in the oppression.'*

*There have been 'several hundred' suicide attempts at Guantanamo, many more than suggested in official accounts, according to the Statement. Camp authorities recorded 32 attempts by prisoners to kill themselves before they stopped counting them and created a new category of 'manipulative self-injurious behaviour', for which figures are not disclosed. But the report suggests that attempted suicides are just the tip of the iceberg. It describes in vivid detail the deteriorating mental health of prisoners, including Britons, and alleges that guards have assaulted men who have serious health problems. 'For at least 50 of those their behaviour is so disturbed as to show that they are no longer capable of rational thought or behaviour ... It is something that only a small child or animal might behave like ... These people were obviously seriously ill and yet we understand [from the military police] that they still get interrogated, and if they say someone is from al-Qaida then that information is used.' The excerpt from the three men's Statement follows:*

\* \* \*

A few prisoners only are mentioned here.

### **Jamil el-Banna and Bisher al-Rawi**

Asif says he was in Mike block in Camp Delta next to Suwad Al Madini (a Saudi national whose wife is British and whose children are British, also known as

Shakir ...). He recollects, 'A large number of the men were brought into the block from isolation. I believe they came in February 2003 having spent a month in isolation in Guantanamo Bay after they arrived. Abu Ennis, Jamil el-Banna, was put in the cell next to me. Given that he had been in isolation for a month and before that in Bagram Airbase (and before that I understood in Gambia), he was still coping but quite soon after he began to deteriorate. I didn't talk to him much about the Gambia but knew he'd gone there to set up a business. He said that Bagram was very rough. When he arrived at Guantanamo he had very little facial or head hair which he said had all been shaved off in Bagram Airbase. He said that he had been forced to walk around naked, coming and going from the showers, having to parade past American soldiers or guards including women who would laugh at everyone who was put in the same position. When he arrived at Guantanamo his English was not good and still is not good. Bisher al-Rawi was placed on the same row of cells and he used to translate for him. El-Banna was in constant pain from his joints because he suffered from rheumatism and he was diabetic. He told them repeatedly that he was diabetic and they would not believe him.'

'They used to come and take his blood and say that there was nothing wrong with him. Bisher al-Rawi also told them that el-Banna was not well. When you come new they come and take your blood.' (Shafiq recollects that they were told by the guards and by the medical officers who were military, that costs were being cut in respect of food and medicine. They said that the cost of the military personnel was going up and that meant that they had to cut costs in other ways which included food for the prisoners and medical care for the prisoners.

'It was very noticeable by the time we left that the quality of food and the amount of food had gone down. The food had been particularly bad at the beginning. It had improved slightly during the time we were there, but used to noticeably improve just before there was a visit from the Foreign Office.'

(During the first Ramadan Asif recollects they were fasting, obviously. However they would only be provided with two meals a day and those were drastically reduced amounts like four teaspoonfuls of rice. 'We were under the firm impression during the first Ramadan that it was part of a policy to stop us fasting and to cause us to abandon our religious practices. When Ramadan finished the food went back up to normal levels and therefore it was very obvious that it was designed to put pressure on us to stop fasting, which also the doctors and the guards were telling us to stop. The guards served us the food who had been told (they told us this) that they were under orders to give us that much food from their superior officers. When asked after Ramadan why we were back to normal sized rations we were told that the General had ordered that now.')

'It was very clear that el-Banna was devoted to his family. He had photographs of his children including his new daughter. These had come in through the Red Cross. I can recollect one day when the interrogator came to visit him in the block. When she visited him in the block he showed her the pictures of his children and started crying and she said to him we're trying to get

you out of here (this was an American interrogator), we know you're an innocent man. I could see as the months went by,' says Asif, 'that he was worrying more and more and that this was having an effect on his mental health. He constantly talked about his children and who would look after them.' (Asif and Shafiq both comment that the repeated questions for Jamil el-Banna whom they questioned less than they questioned Bisher al-Rawi, concerned Abu Qatada and where he was. In the light of the fact that Abu Qatada is known to have been arrested in England in late 2002, it seems extraordinary that this was a question that the Americans were asking.)

Shafiq says that to his knowledge during the time that el-Banna was in Guantanamo he lost about 40 kilos in weight. He started off as someone quite bulky and became someone very, very thin. Asif is aware that el-Banna found it almost impossible to eat the food that was provided. What was provided was a meal packet. 'The meal packets were what we could eat. We were told they cost \$7 each and consisted of a main meal, pasta and Alfredo sauce, pasta and vegetables in tomato sauce, black bean burrito, cheese tortellini. The soldiers said that they were inedible, that they wouldn't eat them, but to us they were much much better than what we had before. There were more calories in them and they were more filling. They weren't nice but we felt fuller. Some of these packages were marked to show they were over 12 years old. But then they stopped them around July 2003 and we were told by the guards that they cost too much. (However, a brand new cafeteria was built for the guards. At that point we were told that they had ice cream added to their menu.) el-Banna could manage to eat the packaged meals (called MRE), but he couldn't eat anything else. When they stopped giving those el-Banna couldn't manage to eat anything else. He told the doctors but the General said no one could have these prepackaged meals anymore and he couldn't eat what was on offer. We're completely sure that for the three weeks before we left he wasn't able to eat at all. Eventually we are aware that they put Bisher al-Rawi next to him (they had been separated) to try to keep him going mentally and physically. We would say that mentally basically he's finished. The last thing we heard about him this year before we came back to England was that when he went to interrogation they told him that he was going to be sent back to Jordan and he was extremely scared of that prospect. We knew that he'd been living in England for about ten years and was a refugee and that his whole life was in England and his wife and children. They were clearly the centre of his whole existence and all he ever really thought about. The prospect of being sent to Jordan meant to him the end of his life. He knew that the would be tortured or killed there.'

### **Bisher al-Rawi**

Asif and Shafiq both remember that he was taken for a lie detector test about two weeks after he arrived from isolation in Guantanamo Bay (about six weeks after he got to Cuba), and was told that he'd passed it. He was put up to Level 1, the highest level (when Shafiq was there) but then 'for reasons we don't know and



after he'd passed his lie detector test we suddenly heard the he was in isolation and the "privileges" that he'd been given like magazines were taken away as everything else. We asked him later on when we saw him why he'd been put in isolation and he had no idea. They kept saying to him that he knew more than he was saying.

Bisher al-Rawi had an armband on saying "Iraq" and Jamil el-Banna has an armband on saying "Jordan", even though both of them lived in England.

When Bisher was put in isolation they shaved his head and beard. We know that Bisher was interrogated probably more than 50 times (unlike el-Banna who was probably not interrogated more than about five times). We don't know the exact reasons why Bisher al-Rawi's hair and beard were shaved off but we know that what used to happen to others would be that if you said you didn't want to go to interrogation you would be forcibly taken out of the cell by the ERF team. You would be pepper-sprayed in the face which would knock you to the floor as you couldn't breathe or see and your eyes would be subject to burning pain. Five of them would come in with a shield and smack you and knock you down and jump on you, hold you down and put chains on you. And then you would be taken outside where there would already be a person with clippers who would forcibly shave your hair and beard. Interrogators gave the order for that to be done; the only way in which this would be triggered would be if you were in some way resisting interrogation, in some way showing that you didn't want to be interrogated. Or if during interrogation you were non-cooperative then it could happen as well.

(It was our view that they were looking for vulnerabilities all the time and that the people who seemed most comfortable having a beard or most used to it, those were the ones that they would shave it off. We think with the three of us that they thought we would not be so affected if it happened to us. They would watch how you wash, how you eat, how you pray and the guards would talk to you perhaps because we sounded more like the guards themselves and western that they did not think that we had those same vulnerabilities. They undoubtedly thought we had vulnerabilities, but different ones such as liking to talk to people, not liking to be alone, etc., and those were the ones they focused on with us.)

According to Bisher they seemed obsessed with what he was doing in Gambia and who sent him there and where he got the money from to go and to finance their business project. They were still asking him about a battery charger that he had in his possession in his baggage on the plane. The Americans were asking him about that.'

### **Moazzam Begg**

'Moazzam Begg we never saw. We only heard about him, particularly from Saad Al Madini, who was a Pakistani brought up in Saudi Arabia. He had been in Bagram Airbase with Moazzam Begg and he had himself been taken from Bagram Airbase. He had been we think handed over by Indonesia to the Americans, kept in Bagram Airbase, taken from Bagram Airbase to Egypt where he had been tortured and then taken back to Bagram and then to Guantanamo.



While we never saw Moazzam Begg, we did talk to guards who had had contact with him and they told us that he had been in isolation all the time he was there and had only seen them and no one else. Four guards told us that he was in a very bad way. In addition, he was in Bagram for a year and no one that we know of had ever been there for a year and must be in a worse state coming out of it. People coming from there used to tell us that there was a British guy imprisoned there and that must have been Moazzam Begg.

We don't know but have the impression that he may have had 'admissions' forced out of him at Bagram which he did not want to continue when he got to Guantanamo Bay and the authorities kept him in isolation to stop him being able to go back on what he may have said or to have the chance of getting any support from anyone else that might cause him to resist what they wanted. We believe that he was in isolation in Camp Delta and then in isolation in Camp Echo. The impression we have is that the point of keeping people in complete isolation in Camp Echo was so that they would in every way be under the control of the people who held them there. They would have no other information than what they were given by the guards or the interrogators and would be obliged to put all their trust in what they said and would know nothing whatsoever about what was happening in the outside world or even in Guantanamo Bay. The guards were especially picked to go to Echo. We talked to people who had come back from Camp Echo.'

### **Mamdouh Habib**

'One was Mamdouh Habib, who was the Australian. He said that there was no natural light at all there. Even when you went to the shower, which was 'outside', it was still sealed off so you couldn't see any natural light at all. You couldn't tell what time of day or night it was. You were in a room and a guard was sitting outside watching you 24 hours a day. That was his job, just to sit outside the cell and watch you.

Habib himself was in catastrophic shape, mental and physical. As a result of his having been tortured in Egypt where he was taken from Bagram and then brought back, he used to bleed from his nose, mouth and ears when he was asleep. We would say he was about 40 years of age. He got no medical attention for this. We used to hear him ask but his interrogator said that he shouldn't have any. The medics would come and see him and then after he'd asked for medical help they would come back and say if you cooperate with your interrogators then we can do something. (Shafiq says 'Habib told me this and I have also heard them say it to other detainees as well'.) Asif recalls that 'another man who'd been taken to Egypt and tortured there, Saad Al Madini, was also refused medical assistance for the same reason. We know from Al Madini that he had had electrodes put on his knees and something had happened to his bladder and he had problems going to the toilet. He told us that when he was in interrogation he was told by the interrogators that if he cooperated he would be first in line for medical treatment.'

**Omar Khadr**

Rhuhel recollects ‘the same thing also, we are aware, happened to a young Canadian man, Omar Khadr, who was aged 17 when we left. He had been shot three times at point blank range and his lung punctured and had shrapnel in one eye and a cataract in the other. They would not operate on him. He was told that was because he would not cooperate. We were told one time when he was in isolation he was on the floor very badly ill. The guards called the medics and they said they couldn’t see him because the interrogators had refused to let them. We don’t know what happened to him (he had had some sort of operation when he was still in Afghanistan but he was in constant pain in Guantanamo and still undoubtedly is and they would not give him pain killers.’ (He was one door from Rhuhel in the same block and all three used to talk to him).

**Mohamed Rajab**

‘One man, a Yemeni, Mohamed Rajab, was in a particularly bad state. Every two hours he would get moved from cell to cell, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, sometimes cell to cell, sometimes block to block, over a period of eight months. He was deprived of sleep because of this and he was also deprived of medical attention. He’d lost a lot of weight. We were aware that he had a painful medical problem, haemorrhoids, and that treatment was refused unless he cooperated. He said he would cooperate and had an operation. However, the operation was not performed correctly and he still had problems. He would not cooperate. We were aware that shortly before we came back to England he was put into Romeo block where you were stripped naked. We would see people go and come for Romeo. When they went they would go fully clothed. When they came back they would only have shorts on. They told us that they would have all their clothes taken off in the cell. The Red Cross is aware of this. If the interrogators after that thought you should be allowed clothes, then you were allowed them. This appeared to be an open-ended process depending on the interrogation and the interrogators. The people we know who went to that block were not people who caused problems or were disruptive. The whole application of these measures was entirely to do with interrogators and whether they thought they were getting out of them what they could and should get out of them. All the Bosnians were there for instance.’

**Algerian detainees kidnapped in Bosnia**

‘By Bosnians we mean six Algerians who were unlawfully taken from Bosnia to Guantanamo Bay. They told us how they had won their Court case in Bosnia. As they walked out of Court, Americans were there and grabbed them and took them to Camp X-Ray, January 20, 2002. They arrived five days after us. They were kept naked in their cells. They were taken to interrogation for hours on end. They were short shackled for sometimes days on end. They were deprived of their sleep. They never got letters, nor books, nor reading materials. The Bosnians had the same interrogators for a while as we did and so we knew the names which were the same as ours and they were given a very hard time by those. They told

us that the interrogators said if they didn't cooperate that they could ensure that something would happen to their families in Algeria and in Bosnia. They had dual nationality. They had families in Bosnia as well as in Algeria.

(From what we could see interrogators used to prey on particular groups of nationality so that Europeans would have the same interrogators, North Africans would have the same, etc.). One of the methods of interrogation was to say that someone in Cuba had told them that we were in a particular place, for instance, the video we've described and training camps in Kandahar. When we asked who it was, they would not tell us.'

(On one occasion Asif was told who had implicated him because he was shown the photograph of a particular detainee in Guantanamo and told that that man had implicated him and said that you were in a mosque in a training camp in Afghanistan. However, this was a detainee whom Asif knew was mentally ill. Before Asif was told this the man was placed in a cell opposite him for about five days and then taken away and it was after that that Asif was accused. 'We could see the process by which the interrogators seemed to get excited, because they finally got some piece of "real" evidence and simply didn't care that it had come from someone who was mentally unbalanced. One of the interrogators did also let slip that another detainee had identified us as the three who were in the video and said he'd seen us in Guantanamo Bay.' (Shafiq recollects examples of interrogators inventing 'information' about us, about the three, and then informing other detainees of it. For example, one detainee came back after interrogation and said he'd been told that Shafiq said that he and another detainee should not be put together because they were in dispute with each other which was completely untrue. Shafiq had never said anything like that.

'We were told by one Algerian (not one of the Bosnian Algerians) that he had been taken to interrogation and been forced to stand naked. He also told us he had been forced to watch a video supposedly showing two detainees dressed in orange, one sodomising the other and was told that it would happen to him if he didn't cooperate.'

An issue that all three men have concerns about is the treatment of those detainees from countries with a worse human rights record than the UK. Whilst in the Chinese block Asif managed to understand from one of the other detainees that they had originally all denied they were from China. They had apparently said they were Afghani. He says that they were very rarely interviewed. Eventually the Americans told them that if they admitted where they were from they would not tell their governments (it seems they did not know if they were Chinese or from one of the Southern republics due to their dialect). The detainees admitted to being Chinese and within one month Chinese officials arrived to interrogate them. The Chinese officials told them that the US had provided full co-operation. If they are returned to China they will all be executed. All three men report similar concerns in relation to the Russian detainees. It seems that a number of these (possibly 20) have been returned to Russia and their fate is unknown.

**David Hicks**

Asif says ‘I first saw David Hicks in Camp X-Ray. He was a very surprising sight. A tiny white guy not more than 5’3” with a lot of tattoos on him. He told us he had endured an extremely bad experience having been held on a ship where he had been interrogated by Americans and hooded and beaten. Despite that experience, he was in better shape than he was when we last saw him in Mike block. We thought that he had gone downhill. By downhill we mean that he seemed to be losing all hope and more willing to cooperate as a result. We were interrogated a lot but he used to get interrogated every two to three days, sometimes every day. He was told that if he didn’t cooperate he would never go home. It started when he was moved to Delta, that he began to be moved all the time. They wouldn’t let him settle with anyone. We met him again in Mike block after Delta and had the impression that he was being forced to make admissions, the “force” consisting of offers of benefits if he cooperated and removal of anything that could make life slightly easier if he did not. We were aware for instance that he needed essential medical treatment for a hernia and that he was told he would only get it if he cooperated. We do not know the reason for his appearance when he arrived at Mike block; he had always been proud of his hair, but when he arrived there his head hair was shaved off, although he still had a beard. We were told by some guards that he was taken to Echo after he started cooperating and that in Echo he had access to more basic comforts as a reward, although it is our understanding that he was in Camp Echo i.e. in complete isolation from the summer of 2003 onwards and we presume still there, where the only people he could communicate with would be interrogators. The same guards also told us that he had been taken out of Echo for another operation, but we don’t know if that is correct.’

**The Kuwaitis**

‘Fouad Mahmoud Al Rabiah was a businessman, we understand, who had studied in America and graduated from Miami in aeronautical engineering. To us he sounded Scottish. He had lived in England/Scotland for approximately ten years. He was given a particularly hard time, being constantly moved around, every two hours, after General Miller came to the Camp. He took his polygraph test and passed a long time ago and was initially sent to the best section of the Camp but then brought back again after a while. He got extremely harsh treatment including short shackling. Because he was educated, we understand, wealthy, and they were determined that he had to be part of a cell. We understood that he was seized in Pakistan, basically sold by the Pakistanis and then the Americans invented accusations to try and fit. In 2004 the Kuwaiti government came and told all the Kuwaitis that they would be going home in June. When they wanted to know what would happen to them when they got home, they were told “you will find out when you get home.” We could see that he was suffering from serious depression, losing weight in a substantial way and very stressed because of the constant moves, deprived of sleep and seriously worried about the consequences for his

children. Every father in the camp had a huge worry about his family which added to the stress.’ Shafiq recollects when he was next to him in isolation that he was suffering from serious stomach pains and that medication was denied. He was told that he couldn’t receive medication unless he cooperated.

### **Other detainees (including detainees sold to the Americans)**

Asif describes a disturbing number of detainees who have clearly been sold. All three are convinced that there must be a paper trail which will show huge sums of money paid out by the USA for many of those now in Guantanamo. These are some examples (some of the names are familial names, as is customary).

a) ‘Two brothers from Pakistan, one is a scholar the other a reporter, reason they are there because they were having a feud with another family, the other family told some people they are al Qaeda now they are in Cuba. Both were sure that the Americans were paying money for captives.

b) Numerous other people in Cuba who are from Afghanistan and Pakistan were sure they had been sold by corrupt individuals. A lot of people who were having land disputes were sold by the disputers to the Americans. These people were brought to Cuba. The Americans know they are innocent but still they are not letting them go.

c) Abu Ahmed Makki, a Saudi Arabian citizen married to a Pakistani wife lived in Pakistan with his wife and was arrested in Pakistan by the Pakistan authorities. Most of his possessions were taken including his motorbike and cash. Upon his release in Pakistan by the authorities he asked for his valuables back but he was re-arrested and handed over to the Americans who took him to Cuba and he has been there for over two years. He was told he should not be there but they wanted him to spy in the camp for them. He was told once he had cooperated and helped the Americans they would release him.

d) Abu Ahmad Sudani, a teacher in Pakistan who has a wife and a child in Pakistan believes he also was sold to the American forces. He was told that he would be released over a year ago but he is still in Cuba. He doesn’t know when they will release him. He wants to go to Pakistan because his wife and child are in Pakistan. His wife and child are Pakistani nationality and he is a Sudani.’

e) One Afghani man, a farmer about 55 years old, is a farmer from Bamyam. He was next to Shafiq. He speaks Farsi and although in Cuba for over a year was only interrogated on two occasions; on one occasion there was no Farsi translator and he was brought back to his cage. He does not know what he has done to be in Cuba. He doesn’t even know where Cuba is! He is depressed, scared and badly affected.

### **Camp Four**

Asif says ‘numerous other detainees have been told that their interrogation has finished, they have passed numerous tests e.g. lie detector, stress analyser test. They have been taken to Camp 4 but they still have not been released.

It is called a medium security section. When we were in Guantanamo there

were four blocks. One block has four bays in it. Each bay has ten or twelve people in. Instead of wearing orange they all would be wearing white. These are detainees who are always shown on TV playing football. They don't wear chains or shackles. They are said to be people who are about to go home but they yet have been there about one year. These are examples of the hundreds of people who should never have been in Cuba in the first place. The authorities seem paralysed. They can't send them home, they don't bother to interrogate them so they are just stuck.'

## HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

*In its editorial of 21 August 2004, the medical journal The Lancet responded to some of the issues about the treatment of detainees at Guantanamo raised in the Statement of Shafiq Rasul, Asif Iqbal and Ruhel Ahmed, and asked 'How complicit are doctors in abuses of detainees?' This editorial is reprinted below. The article by Steven Miles, on 'Abu Ghraib: its legacy for military medicine', which it mentions, is available on the web ([www.thelancet.com](http://www.thelancet.com)).*

Almost 3 years ago, we asked, 'Does the western world still take human rights seriously?' We did so in response to the UK's 2001 Anti-terrorism, Crime, and Security Act, which itself was a reaction to the events of September 11 that year. We were disturbed by a *Newsweek* columnist's suggestion that the use of torture on suspected terrorists should be considered as a legitimate means of obtaining information. As more details about the treatment of detainees in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and the US Guantanamo Bay detention centre in Cuba come to light, disquiet about contemplating or debating the use of torture to secure information has given way to certainty that this is precisely what took place under US command. The answer to our question posed three years ago is clearly 'no'; human rights have become a casualty in the desperate attempt to get results in the war against terrorism. The question we now need to ask is, what part have doctors played in these abuses?

The UK Court of Appeal ruled last week in a two-to-one judgment that evidence obtained by torture is admissible as long as it is not procured by British officials. The ruling was made in response to an appeal brought by ten foreign nationals detained in the UK for more than two years without charge or trial under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act. The dissenting judge, Lord Justice Neumeister, argued that 'by using torture or even by adopting the fruits of torture, a democratic state is weakening its case against terrorists, by adopting their methods, thereby losing the moral high ground an open democratic society enjoys'. The case will almost certainly go on to the House of Lords.

Currently, 585 people are held in Guantanamo Bay without charge and many have been there for two years or longer. 156 have so far been released. The

official number of suicide attempts is given as 34. None has been successful because detainees are checked by guards every 45 seconds. According to the Guantanamo Bay press officer, about 10% are receiving counselling or medical treatment for mental illness. However the number of detainees with mental health problems may be much higher, given the details of detention conditions and methods of interrogations that are coming to light through the reports of those released. Lawyers for three UK citizens arrested in Afghanistan and held in Guantanamo Bay, who were sent back to the UK in March this year only to be released without charges by UK authorities, have compiled a report based on interviews with their clients. This report describes how confessions that were later proven by MI5 to be false were made allegedly under coercive conditions. How can the UK Home Secretary David Blunkett and the Court of Appeal justify using, for example, such evidence to detain people indefinitely?

Even more disturbing is the emerging evidence that doctors and other medical personnel have helped, covered up, or stood by silently when humiliation, degrading treatment, and physical abuses have taken place. As Steven Miles describes in this week's issue of *The Lancet*, there are now reports of medical personnel in Afghanistan and Iraq allegedly abusing detainees, falsifying and delaying death certificates, and covering up homicides. No unprompted reports of abuses were initiated by medical personnel before the official investigation into practices at Abu Ghraib. At Guantanamo Bay, medical records were routinely shared with interrogators in a clear breach of confidentiality and with the knowledge that such information can be misused despite objections by the medical team of the International Committee of the Red Cross, who in protest suspended their medical visits.

Military doctors can be placed in a difficult position, but the problem of dual loyalty, to patients and to their employers, is well recognised. Guidelines and codes of practice state that doctors, even in military forces, must first and foremost be concerned about their patients and bound by principles of medical ethics. Given these events, the World Medical Association saw the need to re-emphasise its strong and unambiguous 1975 Tokyo Declaration in June: 'Doctors shall not countenance, condone, or participate in torture or other forms of degrading procedures...in all situations, including armed conflict and civil strife'. As one of the other few medical bodies to speak out, members of Physicians for Human Rights wrote an open letter on August 6 to James Schlesinger, Chair of the independent panel to review US Department of Defense detention operations (and due to report later this month), questioning the role and use of physicians and other medical personnel in detention centres in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Guantanamo Bay.

Health-care workers should now break their silence. Those who were involved in or witnessed ill-treatment need to give a full and accurate account of events at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. Those who are still in positions where dual commitments prevent them from putting the rights of their patients above other interests, should protest loudly and refuse cooperation with



authorities. The wider non-military medical community should unite in support of their colleagues and condemn torture and inhumane and degrading practices against detainees. Abu Ghraib should serve as an eleventh hour wake-up call for the western world to rediscover and live by the values enshrined in its international treaties and democratic constitutions. ©*The Lancet*

## **BOSTON SOCIAL FORUM**

*The Boston Social Forum met in July. Tony Simpson sent this report from New England.*

The keepers of the Peace Vigil gather every Thursday tea-time in Depot Square in the small town of Lexington, a dozen miles north of Boston. ‘End the Occupation – Bring the Troops Home Now’ is inscribed on one banner; ‘The US used to be against Tyranny’ on another. The banners are held up by a small group of residents who exchange greetings with the passers-by. Drive-time commuters on nearby Massachusetts Avenue honk their support.

‘There is overwhelming sympathy for our position,’ says a local Democratic Party activist and vigil organiser. This is especially significant as we are on the eve of the Democratic National Convention, or ‘DNC’, at the Fleet Center in Boston. Kerry/Edwards bumper stickers sprout along Mass Ave.

Whether or not to vote for Kerry was the subject of long debates across town, at the University of Massachusetts, or UMASS, where the Boston Social Forum met on the weekend prior to the Convention. The prevailing view appeared to be that getting rid of Bush was the first priority. ‘Then the work really starts, on November 3<sup>rd</sup>’, as Lesley Cagan, the canny organiser of United for Justice and Peace, put it. UJP want to fill the streets of New York with protesters on 29<sup>th</sup> August, the eve of the Republican National Convention. That will pose some interesting questions for the authorities.

In Boston, UJP and others refused to comply with the ‘Free Speech Zone’ established by the city authorities near to the Fleet Center. This walled cage, allegedly for up to 4,000 people playing ‘sardines’, was the subject of a legal challenge by the American Civil Liberties Union. The judge found that the cage was certainly inimical to free speech, but nevertheless upheld that it was necessary to put people in it if they wished to register a protest during the Convention. In response, the UCJ and others refused to be complicit in their own muzzling and caging.

Not surprisingly, Palestinian groups protesting against Israel’s Wall and land-grab, did decide that the walled cage was a fitting venue and symbol for their own protests. Otherwise, as long-time South African activist Dennis Brutus told the Forum, let’s declare ‘Free-Speech Zones’ all round the city. ‘After all, isn’t all the US supposed to be a free-speech zone?’

‘It’s never been easier to talk to people about the war’, according to Jim

Caplan of the Somerville Teachers' Association, during a workshop on 'Organised Labour Against the War', which receives much of its funding from the US public services union, SEIU. 'More and more people are against it.' Tony Donaghy, President of the RMT, spoke of a similar situation in Britain and Ireland. Mention of Tony Blair elicited loud hisses from Forum audiences

The 'Peace Track' within the Forum was organised by the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organisation. The impetus for this came initially from Ken Coates and the European Network for Peace and Human Rights (ENPHR), whose meetings in the European Parliament in Brussels were initiated by the Russell Foundation. The European Network had long wanted to strengthen its contacts and establish a dialogue with peace movement organisations in the United States. AFSC picked up the ball and ran with it at the Forum, broadening the participation to include activists from Asia, Africa and Europe, as well as from the United States, under the rubric of 'A World Working Together for Peace'.

War and peace will certainly be amongst the issues to the fore when the European Social Forum comes to London, from 14 to 17 October. Thousands are expected to participate. 'We are many, they are few', as Rae Street of CND reminded the closing session of the Boston Social Forum.

Meanwhile, back in Lexington, where, in 1775, the shot that echoed round the world marked the beginning of the removal of the British from their American colonies, *Fahrenheit 9/11* continues to play to packed houses at the Lexington Flick, just across the street from Depot Square. The US peace movement is becoming altogether harder to ignore.

## WORLD TRIBUNAL ON IRAQ

*Ayse Berktaş in Turkey has sent this note about the work of the World Tribunal on Iraq.*

The World Tribunal on Iraq (WTI) is a worldwide initiative born out of the global outcry against the war in Iraq. Taking its cue from the Russell Tribunal of the late 1960s, it is aimed at challenging the silences of our time around the aggression against Iraq and seeking the truth about the war and occupation in Iraq. This will be a record of wrongs, violations and crimes as well as suffering, resistance and silenced voices. This will be a solemn process of listening, reflection, evaluation and informed judgement based on concrete evidence. This will be a call to conscience and a call to act to preserve our futures.

The World Tribunal on Iraq comprises various sessions around the world, each focusing on different aspects of the aggression against Iraq, culminating in Istanbul on 20 March 2005. What is unique and exciting about the Tribunal is that it is a truly global network of local peoples' initiatives, who are determined to bring out and record the truth, to elaborate on its implications for our struggles, for humanity

and for the world at large. We are aware that in this process there may arise issues that need further investigation, deliberation and work, that may not be finalised within the scope of the Tribunal. We hope to be able to indicate at least such need and call on new initiatives to follow these up. We believe our power of enforcement lies in our ability, as global movements, to appeal to public conscience and to mobilise around the truths brought out, to create political pressure. This is how we hope to contribute to the worldwide struggle for peace, truth and justice.

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*A Session of the World Tribunal on Iraq devoted to 'Media Wrongs Against Truth and Humanity' will take place in Rome from 10 to 13 February, 2005. The following statement about the Session is being circulated for endorsement and support by WTI-Italy and the Peoples' Law Programme of the Lelio Basso International Foundation.*

The World Tribunal on Iraq is an international citizens' initiative to examine and establish the truth in relation to the war and occupation of Iraq, in order that it may contribute to the empowerment of civil society movements for peace, human rights and justice. It is comprised of various Sessions held around the world (Sessions already held include Brussels, New York, Hiroshima-Tokyo, and Copenhagen) culminating in a Final Session in Istanbul in March 2005. This is a call to individuals, social movements, associations and organisations to endorse the Rome Session of the World Tribunal on Iraq on 'Media Wrongs Against Truth and Humanity'.

The session in Rome focuses specifically on the role and responsibilities of the 'media' with respect to 'truth-telling'. The context of the war and subsequent developments in Iraq raise many issues of public concern about media disinformation and 'propaganda'. However, little of the discussion thus far has involved recognition of the peoples who have been wronged! The aim of the session is to return the focus to the media's responsibilities to the social context of human lives, and to provide an empowered peoples' language to demand accountability.

In contrast to notions of 'professional inadequacy' that have dominated most considerations of the media's role in relation to the war in Iraq, the Session will examine the issues from the point of view of 'wrongs' committed against three constituencies of the affected: the peoples of Iraq; the citizens of the 'Coalition'; and 'Humanity' – the global human population in general, with particular emphasis on the South. The Session will consider the following charges:

1. Wrongs committed against the Peoples of Iraq:

- A Wrong of Aggression – complicity in the waging of an aggressive war and perpetuating a regime of occupation that is widely regarded as guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity.
- A Wrong of Silence – neglect of the duty to give privilege and dignity to voices of suffering.

2. Wrongs committed against the Peoples of the ‘Coalition’: (in addition to the above)

- A Wrong of Deception – complicity, through the validation and dissemination of disinformation, in enabling the fraudulent misappropriation of human and financial resources for war, and away from social development.

- A Wrong of Incitement – culpability for inciting an ideological climate of fear, racism, xenophobia and violence.

3. Wrongs committed against Humanity: (in addition to the above)

- A Wrong of Exclusion – complicity in the exclusion of the voices and visions of the social majorities for people’s security and well-being by privileging instead the priorities of the minority corporate-military elite.

- A Wrong of Usurpation – complicity in enabling the usurpation of human aspirations – for peace and justice – for political and economic profit.

Underpinning the motivation of the World Tribunal on Iraq in general, and the Rome Session in particular, is the conviction that people as concerned social actors retain the right and the duty to establish the truths upon which social judgement on matters relating to peace, justice and human wellbeing may be reached, and to demand that the institutions of power so act. The unprecedented peoples’ uprisings against the violations committed in the name of ‘liberation’ and ‘global security’ against the peoples of Iraq have demonstrated that the deceptions of power no longer hold sway with much of the global population; that we, as peoples of the world, must act to reclaim for humanity the values of solidarity and justice is clear. The beginning of a Peoples’ Law movement is upon us. The Rome Session of the World Tribunal on Iraq is intended as a contribution towards this movement.

We hope that you will be with us in this endeavour. We seek your endorsement and support for Truth, Peace and Justice.

*For further information, or if you would like to provide additional support, please contact the following at WTI Italy: Jayan Nayar – Walter Musco, Peoples’ Law Programme, Lelio Basso International Foundation, Via della Dogana Vecchia, 5 – 00186 Rome Italy, Tel. 0039.06.68.65.352 – Fax 0039.06.68.77.774, wti-italia@libero.it*

## **INTERNATIONAL COURT FINDS ISRAEL’S WALL ‘ILLEGAL’**

*These are some excerpts of the Advisory Opinion that the International Court of Justice in The Hague has rendered in the case concerning the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Opinion was requested by the UN General Assembly, and is dated 9 July 2004.*

The construction of the wall being built by Israel, the occupying Power, in the

Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, and its associated regime, are contrary to international law.

Israel is under an obligation to terminate its breaches of international law; it is under an obligation to cease forthwith the works of construction of the wall being built in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, to dismantle forthwith the structure therein situated, and to repeal or render ineffective forthwith all legislative and regulatory acts relating thereto, in accordance with paragraph 151 of this Opinion.

Israel is under obligation to make reparation for all damage caused by the construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem.

All States are under an obligation not to recognise the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall, and not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by such construction; all States, parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949 have in addition, the obligation, while respecting the United Nations Charter and international law, to ensure compliance by Israel with international humanitarian law as embodied in that Convention.

The United Nations, and especially the General Assembly and the Security Council, should consider what further action is required to bring to an end the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall and the associated regime, taking due account of the present Advisory Opinion...

The Court determines the rules and principles of international law which are relevant to the question posed by the General Assembly.

The Court begins by citing, with reference to Article 2, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Charter and to General Assembly resolution 2625 (XXV), the principles of the prohibition of the threat or use of force and the illegality of any territorial acquisition by such means, as reflected in customary international law. It further cites the principle of self-determination of peoples, as enshrined in the Charter and reaffirmed by resolution 2625 (XXV). As regards international humanitarian law, the Court refers to the provisions of the Hague Regulation of 1907, which have become part of customary law, as well as the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949, applicable in those Palestinian territories which before the armed conflict of 1967 lay to the east of the 1949 Armistice demarcation line (or 'Green Line') and were occupied by Israel during that conflict. The Court further notes that certain human rights instruments (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) are applicable in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The Court considers the information furnished to it regarding the impact of the construction of the wall on the daily life of the inhabitants of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (destruction or requisition of private property, restrictions on freedom of movement, confiscation of agricultural land, cutting off of access

to primary water sources, etc); finds that the construction of the wall and its associated regime are contrary to the revised provisions of the Hague Regulations of 1947 and of the Fourth Geneva Convention; that they impede the liberty of movement of the inhabitants of the territory as guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and that they also impede the exercise by the persons concerned of the right to work, to health, to education and to an adequate standard of living as proclaimed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Lastly, the Court finds that this construction and its associated regime, coupled with the establishment of settlements, are tending to alter the demographic composition of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and thereby contravene the Fourth Geneva Convention and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In conclusion, the Court considers that Israel cannot rely on a right of self-defence or on a state of necessity in order to preclude the wrongfulness of the construction of the wall. The Court accordingly finds that the construction of the wall and its associated regime are contrary to international law.

## **RUSSELL ON RADIO WINS AWARD**

Russell's warning of man's peril from the hydrogen bomb, delivered in 1954, electrifies Michele Ernsting's award-winning radio history of the construction of the first nuclear and hydrogen bombs, and the emergence of the anti-nuclear movement in their aftermath. Everyone interested in the nuclear era will want to hear 'WMD', which is radio broadcasting at its best. Certainly, that was the view of judges in the international affairs section of the 2004 New York Festivals, which recognises 'the world's best work' in radio programming and promotion. Radio Netherlands, the Dutch foreign service, won a gold medal for *Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Race*, which can be heard via their web site, given below. (<http://www.rnw.nl/special/en/html/030423wmd2.html>)

## **AFGHANISTAN: THE SUBVERSION OF RELIEF**

In late July 2004, *Médecins sans Frontières* (MSF) pulled out of Afghanistan after having provided humanitarian assistance there for nearly 24 years. The reasons for the organisation's withdrawal included a deterioration of the security environment in Afghanistan and, more importantly, the misuse of humanitarian aid by US military forces in the country.

*Médecins sans Frontières* also said it was unhappy with the lack of progress in a government investigation of the killing of five of its aid workers in the

northern province of Baghdis in June, presumably by insurgents. MSF, which employed about 1,400 local staff and 80 international staff, ended all its operations last week.

‘In Afghanistan, the US-backed coalition has constantly sought to use and co-opt humanitarian assistance to build support for its military and political ambitions,’ says Michael Neuman, programme officer at *Médecins sans Frontières*.

‘By doing so, providing aid is no longer perceived as being a neutral and impartial act, and this is endangering humanitarian aid workers and this is jeopardising assistance to the Afghan people – the assistance which is needed’.

Neuman said *Médecins sans Frontières* has been raising general concerns about the blurring of humanitarian and military objectives for years. ‘We have done this at meetings with officials for different countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom,’ he added. Wherever there are coalition forces – or even United Nations agencies – mixing political and humanitarian mandates, ‘you will continue to see a danger for impartial, neutral and humanitarian action,’ he said.

‘Humanitarian assistance is only possible when armed actors respect the safety of humanitarian actors. This is why we are calling on the coalition to cease all activity which tries to put humanitarian aid in the service of their political and military objectives,’ Neuman added.

‘We understand why MSF feels that their position has become untenable. Oxfam International is gravely concerned about the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, which is increasingly affecting the ability for humanitarian and development organisations to work,’ said Caroline Green of Oxfam. In 2004, six staff members from Oxfam partner organisations have been killed in attacks in provinces previously considered to be relatively safe. ‘However, we feel strongly that Oxfam is providing important services to the poor people of Afghanistan and the risks we face are currently manageable and we feel that we are able to continue working in Afghanistan,’ continued Green.

## **HIROSHIMA'S PEACE DECLARATION**

*Tadatoshi Akiba, the Mayor of Hiroshima, made this declaration on 6 August 2004, the fifty-ninth anniversary of the atomic bombing of his city.*

‘Nothing will grow for 75 years.’ Fifty-nine years have passed since the August sixth when Hiroshima was so thoroughly obliterated that many succumbed to such doom. Dozens of corpses still bearing the agony of that day, souls torn abruptly from their loved ones and their hopes for the future, have recently resurfaced on Ninoshima Island, warning us to beware the utter inhumanity of the atomic bombing and the gruesome horror of war.



Unfortunately, the human race still lacks both a lexicon capable of fully expressing that disaster, and sufficient imagination to fill the gap. Thus, most of us float idly in the current of the day, clouding with self-indulgence the lens of reason through which we should be studying the future, and blithely turning our backs on the courageous few.

As a result, the egocentric worldview of the US government reaches extremes. Ignoring the United Nations and its foundation of international law, the United States has resumed research on making nuclear weapons smaller and more 'usable.' Elsewhere, the chains of violence and retaliation know no end: reliance on violence-amplifying terror, and North Korea, among others, buying into the worthless policy of 'nuclear insurance', are salient symbols of our times.

We must perceive and tackle this human crisis within the context of human history. In the year leading up to the 60th anniversary, which begins a new cycle of rhythms in the interwoven fabric that binds humankind and nature, we must return to our point of departure, the unprecedented A-bomb experience. In the coming year, we must sow the seeds of new hope and cultivate a strong future-oriented movement.

To that end, the city of Hiroshima, along with the Mayors for Peace and our 611 member cities in 109 countries and regions, hereby declare the period beginning today and lasting until August 9, 2005, to be a Year of Remembrance and Action for a Nuclear-Free World. Our goal is to bring forth a beautiful 'flower' for the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombings, namely, the total elimination of all nuclear weapons from the face of the Earth by the year 2020. Only then will we have truly resurrected hope for life on this 'nothing will grow' planet.

The seeds we sow today will sprout in May 2005. At the Review Conference for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to be held in New York, the Emergency Campaign to Ban Nuclear Weapons will bring together cities, citizens, and non-governmental organisations from around the world to work with like-minded nations towards the adoption of an action programme that incorporates, as an interim goal, the signing in 2010 of a Nuclear Weapons Convention to serve as the framework for eliminating nuclear weapons by 2020.

Around the world, this Emergency Campaign is generating waves of support. This past February, the European Parliament passed by overwhelming majority a resolution specifically supporting the Mayors for Peace campaign. At its general assembly in June, the United States Conference of Mayors, representing 1183 US cities, passed by acclamation an even stronger resolution.

We anticipate that Americans, a people of conscience, will follow the lead of their mayors and form the mainstream of support for the Emergency Campaign as an expression of their love for humanity and desire to discharge their duty, as the lone superpower, to eliminate nuclear weapons.

We are striving to communicate the message of the *hibakusha* around the world and promote the Hiroshima-Nagasaki Peace Study Course to ensure,

especially, that future generations will understand the inhumanity of nuclear weapons and the cruelty of war. In addition, during the coming year, we will implement a project that will mobilise adults to read eyewitness accounts of the atomic bombings to children everywhere.

The Japanese government, as our representative, should defend the Peace Constitution, of which all Japanese should be proud, and work diligently to rectify the trend toward open acceptance of war and nuclear weapons increasingly prevalent at home and abroad. We demand that our government act on its obligation as the only A-bombed nation and become the world leader for nuclear weapons abolition, generating an anti-nuclear tsunami by fully and enthusiastically supporting the Emergency Campaign led by the Mayors for Peace. We further demand more generous relief measures to meet the needs of our ageing *hibakusha*, including those living overseas and those exposed in black rain areas.

Rekindling the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we pledge to do everything in our power during the coming year to ensure that the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the atomic bombings will see a budding of hope for the total abolition of nuclear weapons. We humbly offer this pledge for the peaceful repose of all atomic bomb victims.