

# Reviews

## Direct Democracy

**Boaventura de Sousa Santos (editor), *Democratizing Democracy: Beyond the Liberal Democratic Canon*, Verso Publications, 512 pages, ISBN 9781844671472, £24.99**

This collection of articles ably edited by Boaventura de Sousa Santos is consciously perceived as the first in a series of five such books dealing with the issue of ‘Reinventing Social Emancipation’. The other four volumes will be thematically organized around ‘alternative production systems’, ‘emancipatory multiculturalism, cultural justice and citizenship’, ‘protection of biodiversity and recognition of local knowledges’, and ‘new labour internationalism’, respectively. This volume is about ‘participatory democracy’ or why it is necessary and possible to move from a ‘low intensity democracy’ to a ‘high intensity’ one. The latter is characterized by a much stronger presence of forms of participatory democracy that complement and combine with the representative forms associated with a liberal democracy in which, unfortunately, the liberal dimension has always been much more important than the democratic dimension.

Why is such a shift of discourse and practice necessary? This is because the actual history of the hegemonic form of democracy – a proceduralist representative one – has proved itself to be incapable of resolving the growing economic, political, social, cultural and ecological problems of our times. Indeed, its own trajectory is one of diminishing value. Even as liberal democracy has spread in the post-Cold War era, it has thinned everywhere including in its Western European and North American bastions. This is hardly surprising considering its connection to the worldwide extension of neoliberalism as the dominant form of economic globalization. But why is such a shift at all possible? The strength of this volume is that it seeks to answer this question in the affirmative in two ways.

The first approach is on the theoretical level in which basic assumptions of the proceduralist conception of democracy – the impossibility of any significant role for forms of direct democracy once the scale and complexity of the governed space increases; the indispensability of specialized bureaucracies as providers of knowledge and expertise; the unavoidability of authorization only through representation – are assaulted. The second approach is through the presentation and evaluation of the experiences of social movements of emancipation and the structures of local participation that they have given rise to in five countries. Four of the countries were chosen not simply because they represented the three third world continents but because they are semi-peripheral countries of intermediate level industrialization. According to the editor, experiments in participatory democracy have been strongest in such semi-peripheral countries. The fifth country – Mozambique – is a peripheral country chosen to present a counterpoint but also no doubt because the editor has a specific familiarity with it. The overall result, as is to be expected from such

compilations, is a certain unevenness of quality and relevance. One of the best parts of the book is the introductory chapter by Santos and Leonardo Avritzer, which is the theoretical critique of what they call the 'hegemonic liberal democratic' model.

To put one's faith in purely representative democracy and centralized bureaucracies, they say, is actually to deny oneself the very creativity in the use of information/knowledge that comes from its inevitably dispersed nature. It is to deny oneself the greater responsiveness to publicly articulated needs and concerns that is possible, as well as the greater efficacy in policy implementation that more decentralized and participatory forms of democracy can provide. Representative democracy may resolve the problem of authorization, but it cannot be sufficiently sensitive to the need for high levels of accountability nor can it assure proper respect and articulation of the concerns of minority identities. And *contra* Isaiah Berlin, value pluralism does not mean that the essence of democracy must forever be a proceduralism or that it can never be structured in ways that promote a 'common good'. Here Habermas's work on the importance of a deliberative democracy, of a public space and of rational discourse provides an important counter and corrective to the dominant liberal democratic discourse. Habermas connects the principle of participation and representation in a deeper synthesis. Indeed, participatory budgeting as in Brazil and elsewhere is a real-life validation of his claims. Ultimately, Santos and Avritzer remind us that democracy is not primarily about the restriction of state power but about the disalienation of social power, be it the power of patriarchy in the household, exploitative power in the workplace, identity hierarchies in the community-space, the fetishism of commodities in the marketplace, or unequal exchange in the world-space.

When it comes to the various case studies it is not quite clear why two chapters are devoted to each of the other four countries while Colombia gets five chapter treatments. These case studies are divided into four parts. The first part is titled 'Social Movements and Democratic Aspirations'. Part two is titled 'Women's Struggle for Democracy'. Part three is totally devoted to democratic struggles in Colombia despite its ongoing civil war. And part four is about 'Participatory Democracy in Action'. In part one, D.L. Sheth provides an overview of how in India certain social movements in the 1990s have sought to counter the promotion of neoliberal globalization by urban élites and, in doing so, have encouraged various practices of participatory democracy. These are movements that are linked to indigenous traditions, both of Gandhianism and of left social democracy. These have opposed the destructive impulses of development, the distortions of discourse, and the socio-economic inequalities that have all been fostered by current globalization. These movements constitute rays of hope but are encased within a wider trajectory that shows no signs of deviating away from neoliberalism, and this tends to undercut Sheth's own optimism about the future.

Sakhela Buhlungu explains how and why grassroots democratic bodies that sprang up during the struggle against apartheid have declined and degenerated in the post-apartheid era. The writer's assessment is reinforced in another chapter by Shamim Meer appearing in part two that explains why white women have benefited most from the struggle for gender equality in South Africa. The key problem in both

cases has been that the end of apartheid came about through a negotiated pact between two élites that led to a restructuring of the political sphere without any restructuring of the economic sphere. What is more, the top leaders of the African National Congress were people in prisons or in exile long separated from the day-to-day involvement in the grassroots movements and struggles, less controlled by them and thus more susceptible to the material temptations and rewards that could come to them as a result of their ascendance after the political transition.

Two pieces on the strengths and limitations of women's struggles in Mozambique by Conceicao Osorio and Maria Jose Arthur are informative certainly but hardly encouraging in that the Women's Committees in Mozambique seem to have become firmly subordinated to party dictates. The female leadership of these Committees, rather than challenging the predominantly male party hierarchy and ethos, seems to have settled for a 'promotion of women' through the standard route of putting in more female faces in the higher echelons rather than trying to achieve more substantive transformations in the relationship between the sexes in the political parties and in their front organizations.

The coverage of Colombia is of course the most comprehensive. Rodrigo Uprimny and Mauricio Garcia Villegas describe the role of the Constitutional Court in the 1990s. This Court gave strong judicial support to the rights of indigenous people and to the middle class debtors' movement. There are some acute observations about the strengths and weaknesses of such judicial activism and its relationship to social emancipation. The struggle of coca planters and harvesters, in 1996, in the western region of Colombia is graphically portrayed by Maria Ramirez. This struggle enabled these marginalized and targeted communities to achieve a new dignity. Their very success in getting a government, which had been committed to arbitrarily and forcibly destroying their crops, to negotiate with them and to discuss alternative cropping arrangements was a decisive form of self-empowerment and dignity enhancement.

Elsewhere, despite the ultimate decay of the peoples' militias comprising poor youth in the drug capital of Medellin, Francisco-Gutierrez Sanin and Ana Maria Jaramillo show how they did nevertheless play for a long time a remarkable role in containing criminal mafia gangs. In the Uraba region, banana workers allied with left guerrillas to strengthen their union and, having achieved a significant stature, began negotiating with banana producers from a new position of strength. A new set of relationships then emerged in which steady material progress could now be obtained through the institutionalization of collective bargaining mechanisms and principles. This required moving away from the FARC while the other main guerrilla group, the EPL, had abandoned armed struggle by the early 1990s and become partially incorporated within the existing structures of political and class power. Here, Mauricio Romero paints a complex picture of how substantial cooptation becomes the price paid by the banana workers for real benefits that otherwise would not have been achieved.

The case studies that are most inspiring and represent the most advanced experiences of sustained participatory democracy are left for the last part of the book. Maria Teresa Uribe gives us the story of how the citizens of San Jose de Apartado, strategically situated in the foothills of the Aribe mountain range (whose upper

reaches were the safe havens of the FARC), were caught in the crossfire of the bitter armed conflict between the army and paramilitaries on one side and the FARC on the other. These citizens first decided, in 1996, to move towards a declaration of neutrality in this conflict and then, in 1997, to publicly declare themselves a 'community of peace'. This did not make them immune to armed assaults (mostly from the side of the army/paramilitaries). But theirs is nonetheless an inspiring story of courage, resilience and persistence. International recognition as a 'community of peace' from various sources – universities, municipalities, governments, non-governmental organizations – all helped eventually to provide a measure of protection and a *de facto* recognition of this universally appreciated community self-description by both warring sides. But this 'community of peace' could not have sustained itself as it did without creating a collective unity that extended beyond issues of protection to a collective reorganization of production and of the functions of everyday life, becoming thereby an unexpected model of participatory democracy.

Santos and Avritzer tell us about the principles, practices and lessons of participatory budgeting (PB) first in Porto Alegre and then of its extension to other cities in Brazil. Although much already has been written about PB, we have yet to arrive at a full balance-sheet of its strengths and limitations. The enduring success of PB in Porto Alegre is based on the actualization of three key principles – every adult can participate; the structure of decision-making involves an institutionalized combination of direct and indirect representative rules; investment resources are allocated by objective criteria that combine general concerns and technical considerations. The overall result is that PB has made a genuine and real difference in the lives of people; it has respected their priorities and ranking of needs.

Much the same can be said of the experience of decentralised planning through the Panchayati Raj system in the state of Kerala in India. This is a three-tier administrative system operating at the ward and village level, at the level of a block comprising, say, 100 villages, and then the district comprising several blocks. The state itself is made up of several districts. The experience of Kerala is recounted by Patrick Heller and T.H. Thomas Isaac, who has been a key participant and activist leader in the People's Campaign of 1996 that sought to bring about this decentralized planning system wherein the state government now allocates some 40% of its total budget to the Panchayati Raj system and control over which is bottom-up rather than top-down. As in Porto Alegre and elsewhere, there is no doubt that this system has led to real improvement in meeting locally determined basic needs. But what the authors on Kerala have not pointed out is that this decentralized planning has also shown itself inadequate when it comes to longer term development and planning for the state as a whole or for its separate regions and localities.

But the larger issues have to do with how generalizable these experiences of advanced democratic decentralization are to other parts of the world and how effective they can be in promoting a bottom-up revamping of political and economic macro-spheres. In regard to the first issue, it is true that the prior existence of strong grassroots social movement-type organizations was crucial for the initiation of such experiments. There was the Worker's Party or PT in Brazil and the powerful Peoples'

Science Movement or KSSP in Kerala. But even so, the structures that have emerged, and the principles of organization on which they are based, have been transportable and their very implantation in different soils has on occasions itself generated the kind of public enthusiasm that makes them sustainable in the longer run.

The main problem, however, is that it is both unclear and extraordinarily difficult to see how such forms of participatory democracy can be pushed upwards; how such decentralized mechanisms can become the springboard to transform the centralized and national-level apparatuses. Thus, in both Brazil and India, the overall economic direction remains firmly neoliberal and macro-level democratic practices almost purely representative. Thus it affords insufficient satisfaction that Emir Sader in a final concluding chapter that ably sums up all the contributions should confidently and correctly declare that the most advanced forms of participatory democracy can combine ‘institutionalized embeddedness and the constant processes of popular mobilization’. The most important strategic-political question for carrying out a truly radical transformation at the macro-level remains unanswered in this volume. How do we effectively link the politics of the singular and particular with the politics of the national and universal? Historically, the main organizational form that such a successful combination has taken has been the revolutionary party, whose fortunes currently appear rather dim. But a ‘radical pluralism’ aiming to stitch together various separate expressions of identity politics or different social movements focused on specific sectoral concerns has so far proved unimpressive as a possible organizational alternative. But these unanswered dilemmas are no reason for being ungrateful for the insights that have been offered in this volume.

*Achin Vanaik*

## Recent Times

**Mark Garnett, *From Anger to Apathy: The British Experience Since 1975*, Jonathan Cape, 480 pages, ISBN13 978-0224073066, £20**

In February 2003, millions of people in some 800 cities world-wide took part in global protests against the imminent invasion of Iraq by the military forces of the United States and the United Kingdom. In England, people from all over the country gathered in London. There was a separate gathering in Scotland, in Glasgow. The BBC said over 500,000 people attended the London demonstration, while the Stop the War Coalition, which organised the day, put the number at two million. Whatever the assessments, it is safe to say that the march was amongst the largest political demonstrations ever seen in Britain. Did these protests influence decisions taken in Westminster? We hear, in reply, a resounding ‘no’! Why, then, should the voting public remain active in the political process if their well-publicised concerns are ignored in this way?

Apathy, annoyance and mistrust of politics are key issues in Mark Garnett’s *From Anger to Apathy: The British Experience Since 1975*. The author examines whether there has been a change in the British people’s attitude to politics over the

last three decades. Has apathy increased whilst anger has diminished, since the mid 1970s? Is the British public more ‘passive consumer’ than ‘active citizen’? To answer these questions Garnett charts the media’s involvement in politics and political involvement in the media during these decades.

The author refers to a variety of television programmes, politically charged rock bands, and tabloid and broadsheet newspapers throughout *From Anger to Apathy*. This helps to situate his narrative for those of us who were growing up during these years. His main source is *The Times* newspaper, which he has subjected to close scrutiny during the years from 1975 to the present. For Garnett, media-led moral panics and exposés of political scandal have been relatively new features of journalism since 1975.

In his view, the media’s ability to embarrass the government of the day, and whip people into a frenzy, reflect a decline in journalistic practice. In the 1970s, politicians began to be held in contempt more widely as a result of scandals such as that caused by John Stonehouse, the former Postmaster General in the Wilson Government, who made an unsuccessful attempt at faking his own death. Later, during the 1980s, anger surrounded the long awaited miners’ strike of 1984. According to Garnett, the media managed to portray the most militant miners as ‘the scum of the earth’(p. 110). They found a photo of the miners’ leader, Arthur Scargill, in a pose that was made to appear as though he was giving a Nazi-style salute. This ‘doctoring’ of the miners’ dispute aided the Conservatives’ closure of many pits in Britain during that decade.

Later still, in July 1994, *The Sunday Times* revealed that Conservative MPs had been paid £1,000 for ‘tabling parliamentary questions’. The tables were turned; where reporting had once favoured and assisted the government of the day in their policies, there was now a surge of damning articles.

Faith in the British political system has been shaken over the last three decades, according to Garnett. The resulting low turn-out of eligible voters in the 2001 General Election is, for the author, an expression of the belief held by many UK voters that it makes little or no difference to their lives who is in power.

*From Anger to Apathy* is a readable and lively account of British politics from 1975 onwards. The author gives facts and figures, mainly taken from *The Times* or other newspaper sources, but never critically analyses the information, nor the epochs in question. Given that his survey observes the ‘decline in journalistic practice’ and the permissive use of the media by politicians and politicians by the media, it seems unwise to base most of his research on the very medium he disparages. This and the lack of critical analysis detract from an otherwise engaging read. *Abi Rhodes*

## How Did David Kelly Die?

**Norman Baker MP, *The Strange Death of David Kelly*, Methuen, 400 pages, ISBN 9781842752173, £9.99**

In 2006, Norman Baker resigned his position as a Liberal Democrat front bench spokesman on environmental issues to devote himself to investigating the events

surrounding the death, on 17 July 2003, of Britain's chief weapons inspector, Dr. David Kelly. He did this because he doubted the official explanation of death by suicide and wrote an article, in July 2006, in the *Mail on Sunday* expressing his concerns and asking for responses. As a result he received many hundreds of letters, e-mails and phone calls, all but three supporting his decision to publish his concerns.

The concerns were well based. On 7 January 2004, the *Guardian* newspaper had published a letter from three specialist medical professionals questioning the verdict of suicide. This was followed by further letters from health professionals expressing their doubts about the official explanation of Dr. Kelly's death, and about the way in which the inquiry by Lord Hutton into the affair had been conducted. Norman Baker adds further doubts about a man considering suicide. Dr. Kelly had just booked an early flight back to Iraq; his wife was unwell and, despite some indications of worry, he had appeared quite cheerful to those who saw him earlier on the day of his death.

Only one day after Dr. Kelly's death, and after talking with the Prime Minister who was in Japan or *en route* for Japan, the Lord Chancellor had approached Lord Hutton, a one-time Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, to head up an informal inquiry into the death. This was a somewhat unusual decision since it pre-empted the normal inquest on a death being carried out by the local coroner. It was a matter of some importance because, unlike a coroner's inquest, Lord Hutton's inquiry did not require witnesses to attend, nor to give evidence on oath, nor to submit to cross-examination. In fact, the inquest was stopped for the inquiry and not resumed thereafter, despite the willingness of the coroner to do so.

Lord Hutton justified this informal procedure in an article in the *Inner Temple Yearbook, 2004/5* by writing that:

'the basic facts which led to the tragic death of Dr. Kelly were already apparent from reports in the press and other parts of the media. Therefore I thought that there would be little serious dispute as to the background facts ... I thought that unnecessary time could be taken by cross-examination on matters which were not directly relevant.'

Norman Baker's comment is 'As in controversial cases where he had presided in the past [i.e. in Northern Ireland — MBB] one could conjecture that Lord Hutton appeared, to a large degree, to have made up his mind in advance'. And what Lord Hutton had summarised in his report was:

'in the light of the evidence which I have heard I am satisfied that Dr. Kelly took his own life in the wood at Harrowdown Hill at a time between 4.15 p.m. on 17<sup>th</sup> July and 1.15 a.m. on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2003, and that the principal cause of death was bleeding from incised wounds to the left wrist which Dr. Kelly inflicted upon himself with the knife found beside the body.'

This summary conclusion was reached in spite of several pieces of conflicting evidence. The body was said by different witnesses to have been found lying face down, propped up on a tree or, alternatively, half twisted and curled up to one side. Dr Kelly was said to have been seen leaving his house for his constitutional walk

on the fatal day without a coat but was found dead in the wood with a coat on. The number of police officers present varied, some said to have been in black, and some in blue. The small amount of blood on the ground was not suggestive of a cut artery and the blood stained water bottle seemed to be propped up out of Dr. Kelly's reach. Two empty packets of co-codamol were found in his coat pocket, but no pills in his stomach when autopsied.

Then who killed David Kelly and how was it done? There were plenty of Saddam Hussein's men who would like to have got him out of the way, but why do it in England and not in Iraq when he was there? The US and British governments, who had launched a war on Iraq on the pretext that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction ready for use at 45 minutes' notice, had every reason to fear that Dr. Kelly would reveal more of his doubts about this pretext, which he had already begun to suggest to the BBC correspondent, Andrew Gilligan. If the British secret service was responsible, that would explain the immediate decision to have an inquiry in a safe pair of hands and not an inquest by an uncontrollable coroner. Such an explanation is given added authority by the erection during the body's examination at the site of death of an enormously tall radio mast required only for communication half way across the world – to Japan, perhaps, or to an aeroplane *en route* for Japan or to the United States.

US involvement would be understandable enough, after the invasion of Iraq, and is given some credence by the extraordinary fact that the chief constable of the Thames Valley police force, which was responsible for the local inquiries into the death, on leaving the force two years later, won a US award for special police services, never previously awarded to a non-US citizen.

The manner of Dr. Kelly's death is, on the face of it, more difficult to understand. But, apparently, as Norman Baker discovered, there are chemical substances which, when introduced into the human body, can destroy life without leaving any trace behind. How exactly this was done in Dr. Kelly's case remained a mystery until Norman Baker received information from a source whom he came to trust but promised not to reveal by so much as a hint.

The story was that David Kelly was seized on his walk but outside the wood where his body was found. His house was raided and the coat and pills and knife and water bottle taken away with the body to be set up in the wood as they were discovered some hours later. To get the body to this site, without being seen, a boat had to be used on the nearby River Thames. The whole job was perhaps made to look amateurish in order to conceal its professional origins, which seem to have involved people from Iraq but with British associations. Three men were certainly noticed in a boat on the river at the time and the behaviour of the police was in many ways most peculiar. First of all, the entry in the police records for the whole affair was dated from a time before David Kelly was known to have died. Secondly, there was the delay in the police arrival on the scene after the body was found, and the long period when one policeman was left alone with the body. Thirdly, there is the strange fact that David Kelly's wife was asked to leave the house and sit in the garden when the police made a search of it for evidence. Fourthly, there is the arrival of the

communication mast. And, finally, there is the US award to the chief constable.

The story cannot be told without taking account of Norman Baker's closing remark:

'between 1990 and his death in 2003, Dr. Kelly probably did more to make the world a more secure place than anyone else on the planet ... the honour (of a knighthood) being proposed at the time should be awarded posthumously ...'

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## Pioneer

**Harry Ratner, *A Socialist at War: In the Pioneer Corps, Socialist Platform*, ISBN 0955112796, £6.00**

Harry Ratner became an active socialist at sixteen years of age, in 1936. He subsequently joined a Trotskyist group in Britain and another in France, after moving there in 1938. When the Second World War broke out, he managed to evade the German forces and get back to Britain, where he joined the Pioneer Corps. Although in theory opposed to the war, in practice he accepted 'revolutionary defencism', that is, the view that Fascism had to be fought, but the capitalist ruling classes would never do this effectively.

Annoyed that the Pioneer Corps was often ignored in official war histories, he determined to write a book to relate the history of the Corps as he knew it in the Second World War and, at the same time, to provide an account of his political activity, as a revolutionary socialist, within it.

Political consciousness within the army in the early years of the war was at a very low level. Harry declined to apply for a commission, so that he could identify with the lower ranks and seek to influence their views. As he makes clear, this was no easy task – although the establishment of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs and compulsory lectures to make the armed forces aware of the reasons why Britain was fighting improved the situation, and gave him the opportunity to put over socialist and anti-imperialist views.

When his unit landed in Italy, however, he found that few of his fellow soldiers shared his internationalist sympathies with the population as victims of fascism and war. Furthermore, as he observed with disgust in a diary that he kept at the time, former fascist officials were often allowed to retain their positions. He learnt years afterwards, with added disgust, that the Americans had made contact with the Mafia to help them take over when they landed in southern Italy.

Later in the war, Harry took part in the D-Day landings in Normandy and in the fierce fighting which ensued. Being fluent in French enabled him to ascertain the situation in the French Resistance Movement, where there was growing tension between communist elements and those loyal to General de Gaulle.

Obtaining permission to attach himself to Resistance forces advancing on Paris, where his mother and other relatives were living, he was horrified by the mob fury unleashed against former Vichy police personnel and women alleged to have slept

with Germans. When he could, he intervened to stop it, but this was far from easy.

In Paris, he visited his relations and made contact with former Trotskyist comrades. After rejoining his unit, he was despatched to Belgium and agitated against the use of the Pioneers to guard coal trains against freezing and starving people trying to pilfer coal. He explained this in an article for the British Revolutionary Communist Party publication *Socialist Appeal*.

By this time, political opinion among British troops was moving to the left, but Harry only ever succeeded in recruiting one soldier to the Revolutionary Communist Party. His efforts undoubtedly aided the leftward trend in the forces, which resulted in the huge swing to Labour in the 1945 General Election. However, he now recognises that his hopes of winning large numbers over to revolutionary socialism were wildly over-optimistic.

In a previous book, *Reluctant Revolutionary*, (Socialist Platform, 1994; ISBN 0-9508423-97), Harry has already provided a fascinating account of his life as a Trotskyist militant. This new book provides greater detail and a down-to-earth account of the realities of seeking to propagate left wing socialist ideas among soldiers during the Second World War, and the risks entailed.

Today, having long ceased to be a Trotskyist, Harry is pessimistic about any possibility of an early breakthrough for genuine socialist ideas and is contemptuous of never-ending splits among those who claim to be revolutionary socialists.

His book, however, is the record of the experiences of an honest and dedicated socialist in the armed forces. Those who genuinely wish to understand the true nature of the struggle for socialism, and the practical difficulties of winning mass support, should read this excellent book.

*Stan Newens*

## Criminal Folly

**Francis Beckett, *The Great City Academy Fraud*, Continuum, 307 pages, ISBN 9780826495136, £16.99**

If any British Government had proposed the following scenario for the country's educational system, one might have expected it to be rejected with contumely and derision – invite a number of rich businessmen and churchmen to put up a few thousand pounds each to become the sponsors and, in effect, the owners and managers of schools in English cities where some children are seriously deprived; close down or reduce funding for the existing schools in the area; pour millions of pounds of public money into the capital costs and all the running costs of these new schools far above the average; relax for these schools the laws about religious instruction, pupil exclusions and admissions, including children with special needs; end the rights of parents and staff; wrap it all up in a funding agreement between the sponsor and central government that cannot be challenged in law; call the schools 'academies' with some kind of educational specialism, generally something called 'business enterprise'; and top the package up with the promise of a knighthood or peerage for the sponsor.

It sounds ridiculous, criminal folly. Yet it is what has happened and is happening to about one hundred mainly secondary schools in England, not yet in Wales and Scotland. Some are avowedly faith schools, some even placing their faith in creationism. All are almost entirely financed out of taxpayers' funds, yet with no accountability to central or local elected government. On what possible argument can such a proposal have been justified? The answer is pure dogma – the belief that private provision is always superior to public, more efficient, better value for the money. The facts, apart from the spin, as they are revealed in the reports of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) do not support the belief. In spite of the extra funding available to them, the academies do not perform better than other schools, and sometimes markedly less well even than those they replaced in their area.

The journalist (*New Statesman* and *Guardian*) and Prime Ministerial biographer, Francis Beckett, has written a carefully researched little book, giving the history of the 'academies' and their predecessors, the Tories 'City Technology Colleges', deemed a failure in 1991 by Labour and Tory ministers alike, but revived again in March 2000 by David Blunkett with their even more prestigious title. Sponsorship was the thing with the promise of private initiative in the management. Ironically, several of the new academies promptly removed themselves from financial contracts with the Government's Private Finance Initiative, so as to be free of the heavy long-term debt obligations involved. They were to be truly free to make their money as they saw best, choosing their own building design, including, if they wanted, a mock stock exchange, or special sports facilities, their own head and staff, and curriculum.

How come there has been no protest – from parents, teachers or local authorities? Of course there have been protests, but these have soon died down when the protesters discovered that, without the academy, there would be no alternative for the parents, no money for an old school, no new school for the children, no jobs for the staff. Central Government can, in effect, dictate without fear of local riposte. Only a national campaign could end this crime, but some localities could make a start. The following are the local authorities with one or more academies existing or in development: Barnet, Bermondsey, Bexley, Blackburn, Bradford, Brent, Bristol (2), Brighton & Hove, Croydon (2), Derby, Doncaster, Dulwich East, Ealing (2), Enfield, Gloucestershire South, Greenwich, Hackney (2), Haringey, Hillingdon, Herefordshire, Islington, Kent (4) Kensington, Kingston upon Hull, Lambeth, Leeds, Leicester, Lewisham (2), Lincolnshire North-East (2), Liverpool (2), Luton,(2), Manchester(2), Merton (2), Middlesborough (2), Milton Keynes, Northampton, Northamptonshire, Northumberland (2), Nottingham (2), Oxfordshire, Peterborough, Reading, Rochdale, Salford,(2), Sandwell (3), Sheffield (2), Slough, Solihull, Southwark (3), Staffordshire, Stockport, Sunderland (2), Telford, Walsall, Waltham Forest, Wandsworth, Westminster(2).

It is clear at a first glance that many of these are not areas of deprivation where extra funding might have been justified, and the detailed studies by Beckett show that they were not, in most cases, required to replace schools that were failing. *MBB*