Reviews

Stepping into Heraclitus Twice

Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: war, peace and the course of history*, Allen Lane Penguin Books, hardback ISBN 0 7139 9616 1 £25

According to Homer, Patroclus went into battle using Achilles' armour, attempting to rally the Greek troops while Achilles sulked in his tent. He failed. After Patroclus' death, Achilles therefore needed a new shield; his mother Thetis placed an order with the armourer Hephaestus and the resulting replacement was an engraver's magical masterpiece, with only a few images of war itself but most of agriculture, commerce and dancing.

Heraclitus[1] explains all this to us: 'War is father of all. Homer was wrong to say: "would that strife might perish" ... were his prayer heard, all things would pass away.'

Bobbitt's widely reviewed new book is a gloss on Heraclitus' maxim, extended to 922 pages and with a twenty-first century American slant. It should be required reading for all peace activists, not because we shall agree with what Bobbitt (or Heraclitus) says, although some of the analysis is useful and insightful, but because we must know the strength of the opposition and the consequent enormity of the difficulties to be overcome.

Wars, says Bobbitt, and we know it too, have significant political, civil and scientific consequences. There are links between Hiroshima and the world-wide web through nuclear weapons, US military planning, and military computer networking. The alternatives, had those wars not occurred, are less clear. And Bobbitt rarely addresses the difference between what is inevitable and what is justified. But he is more dramatic and sees further than does the standard treatment in arguing for the effects of war on society; he claims that wars and the subsequent post-war peace treaties define the very natures of national states. He goes beyond Augustinian 'just war' theory – he defends the Vietnam War as worth fighting, even though it was lost (fighting a losing war may sometimes be the best option available).

Each major war and its terminating peace treaty Bobbitt sees as driving and legitimising stages in constitutional change. The political structure of states has indeed changed over the last 1000 years, and the structural modifications do indeed sometimes seem to coincide with wars and their endings. What we do not know are what changes would have occurred in their absence. Recent British history has seen numerous changes seemingly unrelated to wars and their outcomes. Nevertheless Bobbitt goes so far as having states not only legitimising war but being legitimised by war. In their nineteenth and early twentieth century forms the nation states' very existence is dependent upon conflict, if only economic, with other nation states. We might suppose that the demise of the state would then lead to the demise of war, but Bobbitt shies away from such an

anarchist conclusion. He does see the weakening of the United Nations as associated with the change from nation-state to market-state; and actually looks forward to a decline in the usefulness of existing international law as the market-state becomes the dominant format.

He is cogent and forthright when discussing most countries of today and the past of the United States. I learned quite a bit reading about Colonel House and Woodrow Wilson, and was saddened to note the contrast between the early US-driven initiatives in international law and its current stance on the International Criminal Court. He loses objectivity as he comes to the present day United States of America, referring to 'us' several times. (An even bleaker but more balanced view may be that of John Mearsheimer[2], commenting from an insider's viewpoint – he has been an advisor to the US government under both Bush senior and Clinton.) What is missing from Bobbitt seems to be any feeling for the internal complexity and uncertainty of US internal politics, despite or perhaps because of his status as previous government advisor. He also sees nuclear weapons, a topic on which he has both lectured and written, almost solely from the standpoint of deterrence theory. 'Security' is seen in nuclear weapons and US terms. But he is aware that there is conflict between strategies that include the threat or use of nuclear weapons and those that depend upon smart weaponry. This is to me the one best hope for nuclear weapons abolition.

In an interesting re-evaluation of twentieth century history, he treats the period from 1914 to 1990 as a period of the 'Long War' conflating World War One, World War Two, and the Cold War triad into a single sequence of military events from which we have only recently emerged, despite the fact that Russia (or the Soviet Union) must have 'changed sides' during the war, thus emulating Italy in World War Two. Despite the scholarly criticism directed at this thesis elsewhere, I find it persuasive. Current thinking surely joins World War One with World War Two; the Cold War sprang directly out of World War Two. The United Kingdom, the United States and France have consistently been allied against the Middle European and Eastern powers. France's struggle with Germany in World War One was followed by defeat in World War Two, and then struggle against the internal forces that included the French Communist Party, after World War Two, during the Cold War. The United Kingdom played a core role in all three component parts; 'we' in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth declared war on Germany in both World War One and World War Two, and Churchill's 'iron curtain' (Fulton) speech defined the beginnings of the Cold War. In all three cases the United States dragged its feet but took a predominant role once it was 'in'. Outside that military-political core we have shifting alliances (including the infamous Hitler-Russian pact).

Bobbitt treats the changes in state structure in what is clearly a neo-historicist and arguably almost a Marxist way. The state, in its early twentieth century manifestation as a 'nation-state', is about to give way to what he calls the 'market-state', where cross-border corporations and their activities drive the system, sometimes in peace-positive ways. Thus at one point he sees the use of

nuclear weapons by market states as next to impossible for market-driven reasons (the reviewer is less confident of the state's rationality under conditions of stress). None the less, for other reasons such use, he thinks, is now more likely than it was during the Cold War.

The market-state, unlike its nation-state predecessor, will be unable evenly to sustain the welfare of its citizens. Frankly, I doubt this, as does Will Hutton[3], but it is not central to his argument. Additionally he sees the apparent decline in democratic decision-making as being no bad thing, electorates being so naïve. I doubt that off-the-cuff street interview remarks can be used to evaluate the *naïveté* or otherwise of the electorate. Random groups can come up with analyses as cogent as those of the experts, given structure and time. He also believes that the coming of the market-state means the loss of *homo faber* who must give way to man or woman the consumer, the market-state comprising only consumers and entrepreneurs. One is tempted to ask 'what about the workers?' because any society – even one where manufacturing is highly efficient and low in wage costs, and where service industries predominate – must contain many producers. I produce trained students , research papers and book reviews. So in various ways do we all.

The historicism of the analysis is strongly suggested by the author's so-called 'plates' at the end of Book 1. These are reduced in size and salience presumably for reasons of cost but it would have made sense for the publishers to have spent the extra dollars and made real plates up, perhaps to replace in our minds the famous frontispiece of Hobbes' *Leviathan*. The diagrams summarise the transitions: princely state –> kingly state –> territorial state –> state-nation –> nation-state –> market-state, in terms of constitutions, wars and peace treaties, the state's legal basis, and of theoretical and physical changes. Hegel and Spengler might look at the patterns carefully but Karl Popper[4] would perhaps criticise. The final (?) transition from nation-state to market-state is driven by the ending of the 'Long War' of the twentieth century, and is associated with the existence of nuclear weapons, computers and rapid long-range communication, with the local breakdown wars in the Balkans, and with a philosophical change of motto from 'The State betters the welfare of the nation' (Nation-State) to the 'The State maximises its citizens' opportunities' (Market-State). A gloomy prospect but a possibly plausible Thatcherite-Blairite one.

Bobbitt is scathing with others even as he is respectful. He chides C. V. Wedgwood[5] for saying that the Thirty Years' War was 'meaningless'. For him this war and the Peace of Westphalia (1648) that followed are defining moments in the evolution of the state from the 'Kingly' to the 'Territorial' form. 1648 is also the year of Charles I's trial and execution, but Bobbitt would and does point out that this was a consequence of a civil war and only possible because the wider war was being fought on the battlefield of continental Europe. However, what Wedgwood may be saying, on the eve of World War Two, is that there was no meaning in their participation or advantage for many states involved, even from their perspective at the time. Gustavus Adolphus was supposedly asked on

landing 'Why is your majesty in Germany?' to which he (like Achilles, soon to die) replied 'Does that matter?'. Yet the participants themselves saw a narrow 'meaning' in their roles. Tilly's twelve biggest cannon were named after the twelve apostles. Wedgwood, unlike Bobbitt, is not asking about the long term. In the long term (*pace* Keynes) we are all dead.

The later parts of Bobbitt's book contain some insights and some failures. Discussion of the uncertainties surrounding interventions in the Balkans is useful, but the analogy with the reluctance of witnesses to intervene in the Kitty Genovese murder case (unfamiliar to non-Americans and morally opaque without a very detailed description) seems to me quite misplaced. The psychology of individual action is not relevant to state (any kind of state) decisions, symbolically weak-kneed though they may arguably be. Bobbitt's attempts to portray possible futures are largely implausible in all formats although readers of *The Spokesman* may be alarmed by his insouciant introduction of imagined nuclear weapons proliferation to a variety of currently Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty-compliant states on rather flimsy, imagined grounds. Other commentators have noted the belligerent tone of Bobbitt's last chapter ('The Coming Age of War and Peace') where a magisterial summary might have been more appropriate.

In Auden's poem 'The Shield of Achilles' which – to his credit – Bobbitt cites and quotes in full (here and throughout the book, quotations, from a wide range of sources, including Homer and Milton onwards, argue briefly but cogently against the text proper), the peace and prosperity engravings fade from view – all that Thetis can see in their place are images of destruction, grief and pain. Auden comments and Homer knows that Achilles is doomed to die very soon after receiving the new shield.

In contrast, the defiant Archilochus[6] says: 'may a Saian enjoy the shield I left behind in a bush...my life I could save – who cares for the shield – I'll buy another, it'll do just as well', for which sentiments, writes Plutarch, he was expelled from Sparta. Had Achilles done the same as Archilochus there would have been no nuclear weapons today, and perhaps no biochemistry either. That far I, too, can see; the rest is less sharply defined. Read this book; find arguments against its theses.

Peter Nicholls

Notes:

1. quoted in Bertrand Russell (1946) *A History of Western Philosophy*, Allen and Unwin.
2. J. Mearsheimer (2002) *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, W. W. Norton; reviewed by Peter Gowan (*New Left Review*, 16, July-August 2002).
3. Will Hutton (2002) *The World We're In*, Little Brown.
4. Karl R. Popper (1957) *The Poverty of Historicism*, Routledge.
5. C. V. Wedgwood (1938) *The Thirty Years War*, Jonathan Cape.
6. quoted in Paul Feyerabend (1999) 'Conquest of Abundance', Chicago.

Rolling Back Humanity

John Pilger, *The New Rulers of the World,* Verso, £10 hardback, ISBN 1-85984-393-X

Ever since the appalling attacks of 11th September, 2001, on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, political leaders and the media in the West have been proclaiming their opposition to terrorism and wanton political killings. John Pilger's new book shows, however, that western governments have regularly employed or supported terror and mass killings to achieve their own political goals.

In Indonesia in 1965 the United States, Britain and other western countries gave support to the seizure of power by General Suharto, which led to the killing of between 500,000 and 1,000,000 Indonesians who were mainly Communists. US officials directly provided the names of 5,000 to be killed. In later years, Britain supplied arms to the Suharto regime which attempted to annex East Timor and killed about a third of the population in this bid.

In the case of Iraq, the CIA helped the Ba'ath Party to power in 1963, paving the way for the emergence of the vicious dictator Saddam Hussein in after years. Britain supplied him with arms until he invaded Kuwait. Since then the Iraqi people have been victims of western imposed sanctions which have left him unscathed but killed hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis.

As far as Afghanistan is concerned, six months before the Soviet military intervention the US approved a $500 million covert action programme to support mojahedin tribal groups in seeking to overthrow the secular progressive regime set up by the 1978 revolution. The CIA, Britain's MI6 and the Pakistan authorities organised, financed, trained and armed the future al Qaeda and Taliban fighters and continued to do so after Soviet troops left in 1989. Thus they helped create the regime, with all its barbarities, that they intervened after 11th September to overthrow.

The US supported the Bay of Pigs invasion aimed at ejecting Fidel Castro, and has provided a base ever since for the hijacking of aircraft and terrorist attacks on Cuba. Its record in Latin America as a whole has been one of supporting military regimes friendly to the USA, regardless of infringements of human rights. Training in torture techniques has been provided at Fort Benning, Georgia. Elsewhere in developing countries and in the Middle East, many other examples of similar behaviour could be cited.

The basic reason for recourse to such policies has been to roll back the threat of Communism or any other challenge to the hegemony of the West and to enable western business to operate without serious restrictions in as many regions of the world as possible. Thus, multinational companies have been enabled ruthlessly to exploit the resources and the populations of the globe with scant regard for their economic well-being.

As John Pilger points out, the vast majority of humanity live in poor countries and less than a billion people control 80% of humanity's wealth. The wealth gap

itself between the richest 20% and the poorest 20% has, moreover, doubled in the last half-century. In the normal course of events, effective control can be exercised through institutions like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. Since 1989, 90 countries have been forced to agree to structural adjustment programmes which have cut expenditure on health, education and welfare and opened up their economies to greater foreign exploitation. The international debt is such that the poorest countries daily pay £100 million to western creditors.

The facts assembled in this book speak for themselves. Anyone with a shred of real concern about world poverty and hunger, international justice and equity can hardly avoid recognising that the present world system is gravely at fault. Responsibility for this is attributed in the main to western governments and the media which reflect their outlook. John Pilger details Britain's role. He is particularly scathing about the attitude adopted by New Labour ministers – Tony Blair, Robin Cook, Geoff Hoon, Peter Hain, and even Clair Short – for making British aid for a clean water project in Ghana conditional upon privatisation of the water supply, thus doubling water bills for the poorest.

The book covers many other issues, including the denial of Palestinian rights, the tragedy of Kosovo and the injustices perpetrated against the aborigines in the author's native Australia.It is no wonder that the establishment deeply resents John Pilger for his reporting and his books. He has made an unparalleled contribution to the exposure of the nature of world capitalism today. Every socialist, every progressive, every peace campaigner, everyone committed to the struggle for international equity and the rights of the world's poor should read this text. It is enlightening, it is inspiring and it provides ammunition for the never ending battle to win people over to the cause of fundamental change in the interests of all humanity.

Stan Newens

Are We What We Eat?

José Bové' and Franąois Dufour, *The World is Not for Sale*, Verso, 206 pages, hardback ISBN 1 8598 4393 X £10; Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, Allen Lane Penguin Press, 386 pages, ISBN 0 1410 0687 0, £6.99

Here are two books to frighten us about what is happening to our food, but also to offer us hope and ideas about what to do. Mad cow disease, the foot and mouth horrors, e coli outbreaks and legionnaire's disease have all given us due warning of what happens when a government reduces its regulatory measures to please big business. Less well known is the fact that food related illness costs the NHS £2 billion a year. The comparable figure in the US according to Schlosser is $240 billion and Americans spend another $33 billion on weight loss and dietary schemes. In the USA 200,000 people are sickened each day from food borne

disease, 900 are hospitalised and 14 die – each day! Schlosser shows the direct relation of these facts to the growth of fast food sales. As the number of fast food restaurants doubles so does the obesity rate among adults. Britons now eat less fast food than Americans, but more than any other Europeans, and they have the highest obesity rate in Europe.

The fast food chains work on the principle of catching them when they are young. McDonalds aims directly at the young people's market. In the USA 90% of all children between three and nine years of age will be eating at least one fast food meal each week. Schlosser shows how the fast food chains have taken over school catering and even the supply of texts extolling the merits of their products for school libraries. Children are getting diabetes at a younger age and are even dying from heart attacks due to obesity at ages as young as six to ten. But it is not only as consumers that we are suffering. Schlosser reveals the appalling working conditions in the slaughterhouses of America and the exploitation of young workers in the fast food chains. The description he gives of the slaughterhouses, where mainly young, and often illegal, Latin American immigrants work, is no different from that revealed by Upton Sinclair a century ago – hands and arms of workers going into the minced meat.

But there is hope. Two centuries ago the first co-operative retail shops were established in Rochdale, Lancashire to supply unadulterated food to the workers newly arrived to provide hands in the mills, dispossessed from their lands and horrified at what they were given to eat. There are today a growing number of co-operative organisations bringing whole food direct from farms to consumers and establishing principles of fair trade. This is still largely an élite middle class activity, but it is spreading in Britain and throughout Europe. One of its most powerful advocates is a group of French farmers, who staged their protest by dismantling part of a McDonalds restaurant in process of construction. We are so used to seeing the protests of the big farmers in France at any threat to their massive subsidies that a protest of small farmers at the market power of the giant companies was most reassuring.

This is the story of José Bové and François Dufour who went to jail for their efforts but won widespread popular sympathy. The lesson they have taught is that unity between farmers and consumers can be achieved inside Europe, to grow and sell wholesome food, like the unity between coffee and cocoa and banana producers in the Third World with consumers who want Fair Trade. Schlosser's book has become a best seller. Bové and Dufour's book, with its introduction by Naomi Klein, should have an equally wide distribution. What we eat is our decision. We are not forced to buy junk food. But there is a massive educational campaign to be undertaken, which will have to begin in the schools, where all advertising should be forbidden and where food science should go back onto the basic curriculum. At present it is reported that half of all our school children leave school without having learnt to cook and many young couples and single parents have no other cooking equipment besides a micro-wave.

Michael Barratt Brown

On Yer Bike …

Denis Pye, *Fellowship is Life – The National Clarion Cycling Club*, Clarion Publishing, 92 pages, £4.95

British socialists entered a chaotic and argumentative history in the 1880s and '90s. The Democratic Federation, led by H. M. Hyndman, adopted a socialist programme of common ownership of the land, banks and railways by 1884. It also supported the eight hour day, and changed its name to the Social Democratic Federation. Shortly afterwards William Morris split away to create the Socialist League.

Most working class men obtained the vote in 1884, and several trade union members were elected to the House of Commons with support from the Liberal Party. Keir Hardie, Ben Tillett, Tom Mann and others sought Labour representation independent of the Liberal Party, and formed the Independent Labour Party at the end of 1892. The different Socialist groupings warred with one another and made common cause intermittently. In 1891, Robert Blatchford established the *Clarion* newspaper.

If the goal of freedom for working people was proclaimed through these diverse mouthpieces, the road to freedom was increasingly seen in the shape of the bicycle. The 1890s saw a great boom in the manufacture and distribution of bicycles. Bernard Shaw collided with Bertrand Russell in a celebrated bicycle crash. Mere mortals, riding safety bicycles, more commonly avoided collision, and before long established a whole network of socialist cycling clubs, culminating in the National Clarion Cycling Club. It was Robert Blatchford who provided the mental cohesion which helped his cycles to steer straight.

This little book tells the story of the Clarion Clubs, and celebrates the great Labour upheavals through their memory. Hard labour was involved, distributing the threepenny edition of Blatchford's *Merrie England*, in house to house sales, and giving away tracts by Tom Mann, William Morris and Blatchford himself, writing as 'Nunquam'. Cycling teams were carefully briefed to be 'friendly, undogmatic, patient and persistent'. Perhaps an old copy of this briefing could be made available to the New Labour clones who hector us all on television.

But the lure of the bicycle was by no means confined to evangelism. On the open road, generations of working people found their freedom, exploring not only the countryside, but also new social relations. The women's movements, in particular, received an immense boost from the bicycle, even reaching the point, in 1895, when it began to make a significant difference to Robert Blatchford's own ideas, as expressed in *Clarion*.

This little books carries the story of the Clarion Clubs right down to Easter 1995, when the hundredth annual meeting took place in Skegness. Sadly, anticipating this gathering, the author writes that it would be about as numerous as the first meeting in Ashbourne, a hundred years earlier:

'There will be the same good fellowship – even mutual aid – but what has

dimmed for many is the belief that socialism is the "hope of the world" for the next century.'

PJ

Overthrow King Tony?

Tom Bentley and James Wilson (editors), *Monarchies: What are Kings and Queens For?,* Demos, pp.176, £10

In honour of the Jubilee, Demos has followed up its 1998 pamphlet *Modernising the Monarchy* with a collection of 24 essays on the theme of monarchy. It is not difficult to recognise where the idea comes from. It reeks of the Prime Minister's office spinning a tale of imagined reforms to conceal the absence of any substance in reality. Most of the essays propose different ways of retaining the supposedly unifying symbolism of monarchy in the UK and the pageantry of royal occasions, without the high cost and the almost mystical aura that surrounds the person of the Queen. The royal list should be curtailed, palaces and parks opened up, a more modest and ordinary life-style adopted by the royals, and lessons should be learned in general from the Scandinavian, Spanish and Belgo-Dutch models of royalty. These are well described in separate essays and set against the examples of Japan and Nepal.

Although John Yorke, the executive producer of *EastEnders*, provides a hilarious comparison of his own efforts and the royal soap opera, and Andy Medhurst examines an institution presided over by a queen as pure camp, there are only two seriously critical essays in the collection. Professor Stephen Haseler recognises the powerful force of conservatism in the supposedly neutral exercise of the royal prerogative and reminds us that the oath of loyalty is taken by ministers, judges, the armed forces (and, he should have added, the secret services) to the crown and not to the elected Parliament. It is

Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. In each case, Parliament was only told afterwards, when it was a bit late to alter the decision. Graham Allen rather touchingly imagines that 'the monarch acts as an informal check on prime ministerial power' and adds that 'no one else can do it better.'

Graham Allen really appears to believe that the reform of the monarchy is a distraction from the real test, as he calls it, of : 'caging the biggest beast in the constitutional jungle by addressing the unchecked and unregulated executive power of the prime minister'. But, Graham Allen has missed the point that the very survival of the monarchy is what provides the Prime Minister with his cover; and, as the present incumbent seems to resist all limitations on his personal power, we can well understand why he is an 'ardent' monarchist, with a penchant for a 'people's princess', fairy godmothers, and golden jubilees. Michael Shea, who writes in this collection as having served as Press Secretary to the Queen for ten years, understands the situation perfectly when he writes of the 'disadvantages of having a political figure as a head of state chosen by open election' and goes on: 'We are hugely fortunate in having no conflict between the head of state and the prime minister.' But who are the 'We' he is talking about?

MBB

Politics Reference

Robert Waller and Byron Criddle, *The Almanac of British Politics*, Routledge, 929 pages, hardback ISBN 0415 268 346 £35

Ever since 1983 the Routledge *Almanac* has been nudging its way across the reference library shelves. Initially published by Croom Helm, it was taken over by Routledge for its fourth edition, and now we have its seventh. The result is that it comes boosted by enthusiastic recommendations from all the pundits. It is easily possible to see why when you need to look up any particular Parliamentarian, or any specific Constituency.

The book ranks seats by their alleged marginality and safety, and lists the longest serving Members of Parliament, and the most juvenile ones. The Blair revolution, which came about when the great man appropriated a sizeable part of the Conservative doctrine, and with it, a considerable Conservative following, makes these forecasts less certain than they once were. Thus Dorset South has become the most marginal Labour Constituency, followed by Braintree and Monmouth. For the Tories, the most marginal seat is Galloway, only because the Scottish Nationalist Party failed to make the final push. The Liberals held Cheadle with only a 0.1% majority, and a similar narrow margin accounts for one Sinn Fein Member, and one Scottish Nationalist.

The demographic picture is also made clear. Worthing West has more pensioners than anyone else, with 45.1%. But Bexhill, Devon East, Harwich,

Christchurch, Eastbourne and New Forest West all include two-fifths or more of pensioners. The Almanac calls these people 'pensioner voters', but alas, this may not be the case. We also have lists of the Constituencies where people are most hard-up, and where they are most affluent. The highest unemployment is found in Birmingham Ladywood. The lowest property values are in Rhondda. And there is also a list of those Constituencies most afflicted by foot and mouth disease. The list of university admissions shows that the nineteen least successful Constituencies in obtaining admission to university are all Labour.

The great bulk of this book is taken up with profiles of the elected Members of Parliament, provided mainly by Byron Criddle; and the celebrated brief accounts of Constituencies, largely the work of Robert Waller.

Surprising things emerge from these sketches. Terry Rooney, who replaced the former militant MP, Pat Wall, and who serves as Michael Meacher's PPS, is, apparently, a dour-looking Catholic who turned Mormon at his wife's instigation. It seems he is Britain's first Mormon legislator. Patsy Calton, the Liberal Democrat, holds her seat in Cheadle by only 33 votes. But the Constituency profile shows us that the old Hazel Grove division had been held by the Liberals as long ago as 1966, so that this mini majority is not a bolt from the blue.

Tony Blair represents Sedgefield in Durham, where we are told they used to weigh the votes. But his share of the vote fell back from 'a mighty 71% to just under 65%. There were inevitably mutterings that he had not been seen as much in his Constituency, but this seems an unavoidable function of Government, and in fact the result is little worse than the regional norm, the North East was one of Labour's worst areas, not least because turnout fell by over 10%, as here.'

Here, the biographer lets us down a little, concentrating on Blair's national achievements, and stinting any information there may be about his local presence. One thing that is worthy of note is that Mr Blair did not see fit to put in an appearance at the Durham Miners' Gala, following his second landslide victory.

The Almanac will remain in constant demand among political hopefuls, journalists, and students of ephemera. Good maps, and a sharp eye for the foibles of our representatives, will ensure that this book is consulted for its utility as well as our amusement.

TH

Ancient Heroes

Peter Harman and Simon Mitton (editors), *Cambridge Scientific Minds*, Cambridge University Press, 343 pages, hardback ISBN 0 52178 1000 £40, paperback ISBN 0 52178 6126, £14.95

Ancient heroes populate this book, which offers a series of essays on William Gilbert, William Harvey and Isaac Newton, to celebrate the great Cambridge

tradition. In all, twenty-three biographical sketches are featured, culminating in Stephen Hawking.

Russell and Whitehead are celebrated by Ivor Grattan-Guinness, and Paul Dirac by Helge Kragh. Dirac's papers were commonly described as being lucidly written, 'yet very hard to understand'. Einstein made the effort to decipher these arguments with *Ehrenfest* in 1926.

> 'We spent many many hours going over a few pages of your work before we understood them! And many points are still as dark to us as the most moonless night.'

Today this pioneer of obscurity is rediscovered in a general hubbub of acclaim.

Gregory Blue contributes an appreciation of Joseph Needham, which will be of particular interest to many readers of *The Spokesman*. By the time of Needham's death his labour on *The History of Science and Civilisation in China* had generated seventeen volumes. More have followed, and more still are to come. Not the least of the achievements of this phenomenal work is to shine a bright light from the Orient in order to illuminate our own ideas.

Cambridge Scientific Minds is a remarkable taster, as well as a tribute to the individuals it honours, and the institution which nurtured them.

J. Gregory

After September, Dissent Lives

Phil Scraton (editor), *Beyond September 11th – An Anthology of Dissent*, Pluto, 251 pages, hardback ISBN 0 7453 1962 9 £40, paperback ISBN 0 7453 1963 7 £10.99

The usual suspects are on parade here, and in the fog of rhetoric about wars on terrorism, and axes of evil, it is heart-warming to see so many of them again. Here are A. Sivanandan, showing us that poverty is the new black, and warning about the new surge of anti-Muslim racism following the September 11th atrocities; Paul Foot, exploring the relevance of the story of Sampson to the debate on terrorism; John Pilger assessing the weight of the destruction of Afghanistan, and Robert Fisk's most moving account of his beating by Afghan refugees.

As we write, the war on terrorism appears all too likely to move its focus into Iraq, and then, quite possibly, into Iran. This timely little book can help if it makes people ask why, after one failure follows another, our betters persist in the mad belief that injustice will be ignored provided only that there is war enough to render people acquiescent.

BA