

## *Editor's Page*

**Alan Johnson**

Three pieces in this issue of Democratiya confront the American left's difficult relationship to patriotism. **Todd Gitlin** reviews *What They Think of Us: International Perceptions of the United States Since 9/11*, a collection edited by David Farber. **Anne-Marie Slaughter** explores 'the idea that is America' as the basis of a progressive and values-based foreign policy for the US. And we reprint a speech by **Jean Bethke Elshtain**, co-author of the post-9/11 statement '*What We're Fighting For*,' in which she calls for a militant defence of America's liberal and democratic values.

Each of these interventions fights on two fronts. Each challenges America to live up to the promissory note issued by the founders. But each also confronts what the late Richard Rorty called the 'spectatorial, disgusted, mocking left.' Gitlin, Slaughter and Elshtain challenge American progressives to 'achieve our country.'

We are pleased to make available an extract from **Barry Rubin's** new book *The Truth About Syria* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Walter Laqueur, Emeritus Professor at Georgetown University, has called it 'the most up-to-date and reliable guide available on this subject.' In this opening chapter, 'Why Syria Matters,' Rubin argues that Syria is leading Arab political culture 'back to the future,' by updating the policies and mindsets that have produced nothing but disaster for the Arab world for half a century. At a time of much glib talk of 'engaging' the Syrian regime to aid the fledgling Iraqi democracy, Rubin calls for a heavy dose of realism in dealing with this state sponsor of terror and model of tyranny.

'Given the extraordinary status that the laws of war have recently come to acquire, it's worth asking ... are they well-founded, or is their authority an illusion?' These are the questions **Irfan Khawaja** poses in response to *War Law: Understanding International Law and Armed Conflict* by Michael Byers and *Of War and Law* by David Kennedy. Khawaja argues that much of the talk of international war law is simplistic and other-worldly – the 'intellectual disarray' of the core concepts matched only by the 'rhetorical bluff' of its proponents. We hope readers will respond to Khawaja.

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*Incendiary Circumstances: A Chronicle of the Turmoil of Our Times* is the second collection of the non-fiction of Amitav Ghosh the Anglophone novelist and writer of Bengali origin. **David Adler** writes in praise of Ghosh's treatment of the South Asian tsunami, 9/11, Burma, Cambodia, Kashmir, the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff, and other topics. A Brooklyn resident on 9/11, Ghosh 'looks at the rise of Islamist aggression as an issue in its own right, not simply as a karmic response to the West.'

Democratic Party politicians and netroots activists are lining up to declare the war in Iraq 'lost' and some even talk publicly of their fear that a positive report from General David Petraeus would be 'bad for us' (i.e. for the Democrats). **Gerard Alexander** sends a report from Iraqi Kurdistan with a different message: the 'surge' is working, a democratic Iraq remains a possibility, and violent chaos would fill the vacuum created by a precipitate withdrawal.

**Mark Gardner** analyses the global rise in the number of physical attacks upon Jews and a growth in anti-Semitic discourse. Hostile constructs of 'Zionism' and 'Zionists' are not necessarily motivated by conscious Jew hatred, but have resurrected anti-Semitic motifs and popular hostility to Jews per se. Indeed, the new anti-Semitic consciousness seems to believe that, as Gardner puts it, 'The Zionists Are Our Misfortune.'

**Jonathan Derbyshire** reviews three recent books which bring hitherto unknown works of Primo Levi to the English reader – *Auschwitz Report* (co-authored with Leonardo De Benedetti), *The Black Hole of Auschwitz* (a collection of columns and essays mainly taken from La Stampa), and *A Tranquil Star: Unpublished Stories of Primo Levi*. Following Philip Roth, Derbyshire reads Levi as a 'moral biochemist' observing and notating the decomposition not of material compounds but of human beings.

Ed Husain's book *The Islamist: Why I joined radical Islam in Britain, what I saw inside and why I left* has had a tremendous impact in the UK, clarifying the nature of the threat from violent Islamism, and laying bare its ideological roots as well as its social movement form. Husain has dealt a heavy blow to the simplistic 'Blair's Bombs!' orthodoxy of the Academy-Media Complex. (Hence Seumas Milne, until recently the Guardian Comment editor, rushing into print to denounce Husain as a 'British neocon pinup boy.') In a superb review, **Dave Rich** establishes the importance of Husain's book as 'a moral and linguistic framework for criticising

Islamism while avoiding the accusation of Islamophobia.’ Rich also reviews Omar Nasiri’s and Gordon Corera’s *Inside the Global Jihad* – an extraordinary account of Nasiri’s experiences inside jihadist terrorist networks in Western Europe and the training camps of Afghanistan.

The past six years have found progressives, liberals, and socialists busily rethinking their ideologies, allegiances and priorities. The tumult of the post-9/11 world has shaken up the certainties of the right as well. The result has been what Tony Blair called ‘an orgy of political cross-dressing.’ **Dan Erdman** writes on the fumbblings going on in the US between the nativist right and the anti-globalist and isolationist ‘left’ – a relationship celebrated in Bill Kauffman’s *Look Homeward, America. In Search of Reactionary Radicals and Front-Porch Anarchists*.

**Evan Daniel** sends Democratiya readers a Letter from Havana. He finds important developments at the level of civil society since the 1990s – independent organizations of agriculturalists and professionals, including lawyers, economists, journalists, doctors and librarians, that have emerged outside the purview of the state – and he expresses his hopes for a democratic political opening to parallel increasing investment, a process similar to the transition from authoritarian political rule to democracy that occurred in Spain after Francisco Franco’s death. Daniel believes the international community can play a positive role in this transition but the U.S. needs to take the first step.

2007 is the anniversary of the 200th anniversary of the British Parliament’s decision to abolish the Slave Trade. **Tristan Stubbs** critically examines two books that tell of the shaming after-life of slavery and of its contemporary forms. In *Enslaved*, Jesse Sage and Liora Kasten of the American Anti-Slavery Group assemble a powerful collection of first-hand accounts of the petty cruelties, chronic terror, and degrading personal conditions of slavery today, while Marika Sherwood’s *After Abolition. Britain and the Slave Trade since 1807* seeks to show that Britain continued to profit from the slave trade long after Mr Wilberforce finally won the vote in the House of Commons.

**Jean Bethke Elshtain** and **Anne Marie Slaughter** are two of the most important and articulate voices of the liberal vital centre. In this issue they both explore the meaning of ‘American values’ and of ‘the Idea that is America’ in the face of multiple violent threats.

**Elshtain** provides the archive piece in this issue – an erudite and spirited lecture in 2005 defending the power of American values and of the universal value of democracy as a way of life. These themes shaped the public statement she co-authored in 2001, *What We Are Fighting For* and her 2003 book *Just War Against Terror: The Burden of American Power in a Violent World*. (See the interview with Elshtain in the Summer 2005 issue of Democratiya.)

**Slaughter**, in an in-depth and wide-ranging interview, explores the nature of transnational networks and their implications for global governance, discusses the Princeton report on National Security, and explores the dilemmas of pursuing a values-based foreign policy in a world of multiple threats. She also defends her latest book, *The Idea That is America: Preserving Our Values in a Dangerous World*. The title was inspired by Capt. Ian Fishback, a West Point educated soldier who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, who wrote to Senator John McCain in 2005 begging that standards be enforced governing interrogations in Iraq: 'I'd rather die fighting than lose even the smallest part of the idea that is America,' wrote Fishback. Slaughter, like Fishback and Elshtain, defends the proposition that democratic values and national security need not stand in contradiction.

We publish an urgent appeal for solidarity with imprisoned Iranian labour activist **Mahmoud Salehi** and urge readers to follow the link to Labourstart and send a letter of protest to President Ahmadinejad.