

## *Editors Page*

**Alan Johnson**

The issue features four important contributions to the debate about the crisis of the western liberal-left. In a passionate, clear-sighted and wide-ranging survey of ‘a liberal-left that exhibits a radical over-sensitivity to the crimes and injustices of western governments, but which evades or excuses those of non-western governments or actors,’ **Simon Cottee** reviews *The Fall-Out: How a Guilty Liberal Lost His Innocence* by Andrew Anthony.

**Andrei Markovits** and **Gabe Brahm** review *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism: Cosmopolitan Reflections*, a penetrating new monograph by Democratiya advisory editor Dave Hirsh. They praise Hirsh for the ‘immense erudition, grasp of political theory and European history, and mastery of a (lamentably) vast sea of empirical data’ concerning the pathologies of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, and for his care in situating those pathologies within the broader parameters of the still-evolving debate over cosmopolitanism. Markovits and Brahm go on to explore most thoughtfully what those pathologies tell us about the character of what they call the ‘Post-Left.’

In recent issues of Democratiya **David Zarnett** has mounted a compelling critique of the ideas of Edward Said. In this issue he reviews two books that take a critical look at Said’s seminal book *Occidentalism*. Ibn Warraq’s *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism* and Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* are ‘meticulous’ in ‘challenging Said’s reading of Western attitudes of the “Other” ... [and both] show decisively that Said employed a highly selective and tendentious approach to Orientalist writings.’

In February, presenting the Aung San Suu Kyi Lecture, **David Miliband** made the most important speech by a British Foreign Secretary for many a year. Facing a dangerous world, as it is, while upholding the values that constitute our tradition, Miliband may just have established the intellectual foundations of a post-Blair rather than an anti-Blair foreign policy and identified the great progressive cause of the 21st century – ‘The Democratic Imperative.’ Democratiya readers will cheer to the rafters Miliband’s argument that ‘We must resist the arguments on both the left and the right to retreat into a world of realpolitik. The traditional conservative ‘realist position’ is to say that values and interests diverge, and interests should predominate.

This will not do. Yet in the 1990s, something strange happened. The neoconservative movement seemed to be most sure about spreading democracy around the world. The left seemed conflicted between the desirability of the goal and its qualms about the use of military means. In fact, the goal of spreading democracy should be a great progressive project; the means need to combine soft and hard power.'

In a brilliant and sparkling essay suitably reminiscent of the New York intellectuals, **Michael Weiss** examines the legacy of the literary critic Edmund Wilson, looking again at 'one of the lesser examined leitmotifs of his interdisciplinary and breathtaking oeuvre: his political radicalism.'

Several books on the Middle East are reviewed. **Juliet O'Keefe** praises Samir El-Youssef's *The Illusion of Return*, a novel which turns on the brief reunion, after the passage of seventeen years, of two Palestinian friends, for 'expanding our understanding and providing human nuance missing from oversimplified daily news coverage.' O'Keefe finds that 'El-Youssef knows that within the political lies the hapless personal, and that it is in the telling of such stories of personal experience that we can create genuine human contact.'

**Donna Robinson Devine** praises Augustus Richard Norton's *Hezbollah: A Short History* as an accessible, knowledgeable and spirited introduction to the movement, but questions the received wisdom that it is 'balanced,' pointing to his treatment of Hezbollah's role in both the 2006 July War in Lebanon, and within Lebanese politics. Concerning the latter, she writes, '[Norton's] argument that Hezbollah wants access to the Lebanese political system is simply wrong; it wants domination. And while it holds the loyalty of Lebanon's Shi'a, it does so partly by the promise of "spoils" but also by promoting a fear that infects the country. Armed to the teeth with sophisticated weapons, the organisation does not want to be integrated into Lebanon's political system because without its arms, Hezbollah loses its waiver from the imperatives of compromise and negotiation, elements crucial to the making of policy in Lebanon.'

**Zora Hesová** reviews Vali Nasr's *The Shia Revival. How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* – a 'short but comprehensive introduction to the political history of the Shia in the last century, a succinct account of the most crucial creed principles, personalities and events, and a theorisation of the present resurgence of the Sunni-Shia conflict – which still needs to be placed into the larger contexts of communitarian politics.'

**Rayyan Al-Shawaf** examines *Desiring Arabs* by Joseph A. Massad, an important study of historical debates on sexuality in the Arab world. Al-Shawaf is sharply critical of Massad's tendency to postulate 'the inevitability of (heterosexual) Arab violence wherever there is gay and lesbian assertiveness' and to present 'Arabs who react violently to the gay rights campaign ... as caught up in a broader struggle against "imperialism", to which the gay rights movement is wedded.' Al-Shawaf points out that Massad's argument has already been deployed to 'quash efforts at improving the lot of women as well as ethnic and religious minorities in the Arab world.' By extending that argument into the realm of sexual freedom Massad is 'completing the wilful suffocation of Arabs who look to the West for help in achieving social and political reform.'

Democratiya advisory editor **Barry Rubin** contributes a typically astute and acerbic column noting the reaction of Iran, Syria and Hezbollah to the assassination of the terrorist Imad Mugnyiah in February. Their 'confessions at a funeral' tell us much about the nexus between the three. 'Now that Hizballah, Iran, and Syria have "taken credit" for Mugnyiah's past killings and urged many more in the future, the world should confront the fact that these groups are engaged in a systematic terrorist policy and react accordingly,' notes Rubin.

'The powerlessness of the French' is explored in **Matthew Omolesky's** review of Isabelle Lasserre's *L'Impuissance Française: Une diplomatie qui a fait son temps*. Lasserre points to the baleful legacies of Jacobinism, conservatism, pacifism, anti-liberalism, and anti-Americanism' on French diplomacy, and 'expertly portrays the profound moral and political consequences of stability-oriented diplomatic choice.' Lasserre assesses the hopes of a fresh start that have been stirred by Nicolas Sarkozy's statement that 'I do not recognise a foreign policy that has the sole objective of stability. It was the stability of cruelty and injustice [that was in place during the Cold War], and our European brothers paid the price for it. My conception of foreign policy does not consist of protecting dictators to keep things from changing.'

We are very pleased to publish **Jeffrey Herf's** brilliant speech 'What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean in the "Berlin Republic" in 2007?'. Herf notes that 'despite new attacks against the place of Holocaust memory in the Berlin Republic, it remains firmly anchored in the political and intellectual establishment' and explores the debate about 'what political consequences should and must be drawn from this memory.' The central question taken up by Herf is the following: 'How

will politicians, opinion makers, intellectuals and scholars within the Berlin Republic react to the contemporary radical anti-Semitism, anti-Americanism and, yes, a new totalitarianism that come not from Germany but rather from the camp of radical Islam. Will the intellectual arsenal that has been developed through many valuable studies dealing with the crimes of the Nazi past lie harmless on the bookshelf or will it be applied to the contemporary threat posed by the radical Islamists?

**Evan Daniel** reviews Democratiya advisory editor Marko Attila Hoare's *Genocide and Resistance in Hitler's Bosnia: The Partisans and the Chetniks, 1941-1943*. In this erudite study of national identity, revolution, and genocide, Hoare focuses on the conflicts from 1941-43, 'crafting a narrative of rival radical ideologies, the multinational vision of the Communist Partisans versus the highly chauvinistic and xenophobic nationalism of the Serbian Chetniks.'

**Thomas Hale** reviews *The Cultural Contradictions of Democracy: Political Thought Since 9/11* by John Brenkman. The book 'seeks to understand the spiral of tragedies since September 11, 2001 through the lens of political theory' and seeks to confront 'the neoconservative conception of power, democracy, and military force' with the insights of the Great Thinkers. This project is timely and important but Hale argues the irrationalism and romanticism that, in his view, has been central to both Islamist and 'Neoconservative' actions since 9/11 is not well understood by writers, however great, that are too firmly rooted in the Enlightenment tradition of reason to have a proper appreciation of Romanticism.

**Staff Sgt. Johnny Meyer** sends a letter from Baghdad about the slow and messy progress being made by Provisional Reconstruction Teams in Iraq. Although his commanders still tell him to carry a gun and wear full body armour just to move a few feet outside the Green Zone, Meyer argues the surge has given Baghdad 'a moment of time for everyone to ask themselves if civil war is what they really want.' Taking us into those places the TV news never go, such as a project coordination meeting between the deputy governors responsible for rural service, Meyer reports some hopeful signs. 'On the surface, this meeting merely encourages project coordination between the deputy governors responsible for rural services and the various parties developing the infrastructure of the rural areas of Baghdad. But just below the surface, always noticed yet never mentioned, is the fact that the Shia-dominated provincial council is sitting down at the table with the Sunni members from the rural areas of Baghdad province. Under American supervision, the parties come to the table, shake hands, and hash

out the some of the basic terms that make it possible for two groups to live and work together; lines are crossed and barriers are broken. This is the face of “reconstruction” in Baghdad.’

In Democratiya 11 Joshua Muravchik’s set out his critique of a certain socialist utopianism and spoke of the relationship of its promised ‘leap to freedom’ and totalitarianism, mentioning the late Michael Harrington’s view that socialism would usher in ‘an utterly new society in which some of the fundamental limitations of human existence have been transcended.’ This has provoked an angry response from **David A. Guberson**, who claims Muravchik is guilty of grossly misrepresenting Harrington’s views. Guberson points out that Harrington wrote explicitly about the danger that utopianism could lead to totalitarianism: “I want to avoid that absolutist view of socialism that makes it so transcendent that true believers are driven to a totalitarian rage in the effort to create a perfect order.’ **Joshua Muravchik’s** rejoinder claims that Guberson has missed the point: ‘Is it possible to drink as deeply of utopianism as Harrington did without crossing the line to violent revolution and totalitarianism? Yes. My point was not that utopianism leads ineluctably to mass murder, only that it paves the way. Harrington’s enchanting vision of socialism is a pipedream. At some point, people are likely to give up the dream or to try to leap to it by heroic – and lethal – action.’

**Tom Kahn’s** ‘Beyond the Double Standard: A Social Democratic View of the Authoritarianism Versus Totalitarianism Debate’ first appeared in *New America*, the newspaper of Social Democrats USA, in July 1985. The author was Assistant to the President of the AFL-CIO and was here joining a debate sparked by Jeane Kirkpatrick’s seminal ‘Dictatorships and Double Standards’ published in *Commentary* in November 1979. Kirkpatrick, who served as United States Representative at the United Nations from 1981-5, distinguished ‘authoritarian’ societies from ‘totalitarian’ societies, and argued that democratic societies are sometimes forced to ally, tactically and temporarily, with the former against the latter. Although she wanted all people to have the opportunity to live under democratic government – and in 1983 argued for ‘a steady, prudent encouragement of pluralism, self-expression, self-determination: the infrastructure of democracy’ (‘American Foreign Policy in a Cold Climate: An Interview with George Urban, Encounter, November 1983) – she continued to view authoritarian governments as preferable to totalitarian governments because they were less repressive internally, more susceptible to liberalisation and democratic change, and less hostile to the interests of the western democracies. In a dangerous world, democracies must sometimes make progress ‘unsavoury step by unsavoury

## JOHNSON | Editor's Page

step' as she put it. Kahn's nuanced social democratic response to the problem of 'the double-standard' contributed to the shift towards democracy-promotion in US foreign policy. The editors thank William King for finding the article.

In a wide-ranging interview **Gina Khan**, a British Muslim woman, traces her story of abuse and liberation against the backdrop of the dangerous and unchecked growth of Islamism – 'this backward and male-dominated ideology' – in Birmingham in the last 20 years. Questioning the adequacy of the government's response ('I don't see how the British Government can defeat the ideology in Birmingham Sunni mosques by handing them half a million pounds to eradicate radicalism when no one has even banned the anti-west, anti-gay, criminal edicts on minorities or apostates, or books on the "War on Islam"...') Khan proposes the empowerment of Muslim women as the heart of the fight back that could in time see 'the silent majority stand up to counter doomsday Jihadism.'