

Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe: Transatlantic Relations After Iraq

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John Lloyd

An important part of the European left saw in the Iraq war – and particularly in the protests against it, notably those in various European cities on 15 February 2003 – an awesome moment. ‘The simultaneity of these overwhelming demonstrations – the largest since the end of the Second World War – may well, in hindsight, go down in history *as a sign of the birth of a European public sphere* (my italics).’ Thus wrote Jurgen Habermas and the late Jacques Derrida, two of Europe’s most notable public intellectuals, in an article, ‘February 15, or, what binds Europeans together,’ published simultaneously on May 31 2003 in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in Frankfurt and *Liberation* in Paris. This claim, that Europe found its common identity in that epiphanic moment, hangs over Europe still. It is the challenge that Europe ‘realise itself’ against America.

The Habermas/Derrida Statement

The debate which Habermas/Derrida stimulated by their essay has been wide and deep – published in many journals, above all the FAZ. It has now been gathered together and published by Verso. To the original joint statement have been added contributions by Umberto Eco, Adolf Muschg, Richard Rorty, Fernando Savater, Gianni Vattimo, Susan Sontag, Timothy Garton Ash, Ralph Dahrendorf, Iris Marion Young, Ulrich Beck, Adam Krzeminski and others. The Habermas/Derrida intervention – ‘both an analysis and an appeal’ – describes the attack on Baghdad in phrases of horror and condemnation (‘the civilised barbarism of coolly planned death’) and claims that the ‘power of emotion’ roused by this barbarism ‘has brought European citizens jointly to their feet.’ But, they wrote, this mobilisation only made Europe’s powerlessness the clearer: and with that, the necessity to act to create a state called Europe, which can itself be a decisive actor on the world’s stage. However, Europe is split: Central and Eastern European states ‘are not yet ready to place limits on their sovereignty that they have so recently regained;’ as for Britain, ‘while the special relationship with the US is by no means uncontested, the priorities of Downing Street are still quite clear.’ Only the ‘core Europe’ countries are able to provide Europe with ‘certain qualities of a state’: they should, however, hold the door open for the more sceptical members of the EU to

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join when they come to their senses. Europe is, admittedly, divided – by nation, by language, by tradition and much else. But Europe also has much in common: secularism, a softened version of capitalism through the intervention of the welfare state, a common experience of, and wish to escape from, a ‘bellicose past.’ Above all, we Europeans are not Americans: ‘for us, a President who opens his daily business with public prayer and associates his significant political decisions with a divine mission, is hard to imagine.’ Such is the Habermas/Derrida case.

The case is problematic at a number of levels.

First, it is not an irrelevant aside to note that ‘we Europeans’ do not have to imagine a political leader who owns or control nearly all of his country’s TV channels and who has manipulated legislation to exempt him and his associates from prosecution. Nor do we have to imagine a leader who won re-election with millions of votes from those who, faced with a choice between him and a racist demagogue, voted for him under the slogan ‘better a crook than a fascist.’ One is the Prime Minister of Italy, the other the President of France. Both have served as President of the European Union and have led ‘us Europeans.’

Second, the discourse on Europe as the saviour of democratic and humanist virtues from the maw of Bush’s America can work only by relegating such facts to the level of the grubby present of national politics, and concentrating one’s gaze on the glorious future of European unity. Yet the future can only be built from the present: and the present simply does not have the preconditions for the creation of a state, or even a semi-state which can command support. Thanks to the referenda, we now know that.

Third, many of the contributors make roughly the same assumption as Habermas/Derrida: only a super-state will do. Umberto Eco, for example, thinks that Europe should wake up to the fact that, however much some deluded souls might want America, America doesn’t want them – ‘with the United States shifting its attention to the Middle East and to the immense universe of the Pacific, Europe might not count any more.’ Thus, according to Eco, Europe must unite or become irrelevant. ‘Europe is condemned to find common strategies for foreign policy and defence. Otherwise it will become, no offence to anyone, Guatemala.’ No offence, Umberto (though I’m not Guatemalan) – except to common sense. To suggest there is nothing between a superstate and Guatemala is, to say the least, a thin argument.

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Fourth, there is a tendency to treat national sovereignties as illusory, with some attendant anti-democratic implications. Some suggest that Europe is brought together not just by an aversion to the US, but also by a proclivity for peace. Adolph Muschg, a Swiss scholar and writer who is President of the Academy of Arts in Berlin, writes that ‘core Europe has learned to make peace with itself, *a tout prix*; for the price paid for it remains an enduring obligation of Europe and to Europe’ a formulation which sounds nice, but is desperately cloudy. Barbara Spinelli, a writer for *La Stampa* (and the daughter of one of the founding theorists of the EU, Altiero Spinelli) is impatient with any politician who stands in the way of the conclusion of a federal state: she blames both France and the UK for retaining national vetoes – being particularly harsh on France (after all, ‘Blair’s Great Britain is merely a pawn in the US strategy,’ so what can you expect from *it*.) ‘Even if they are completely illusory,’ she says, ‘individual national sovereignties are untouchable.’ But to call national sovereignties an illusion is an even thinner argument than Eco’s: it elides the question of what gives sovereignty – that is, the will of the voters, expressed in elections and embedded in centuries of culture and tradition.

Fifth, Richard Rorty, one of several American voices, falls into the general mistake of US liberals in assuming Europe can and should act as a uniformly anti-Bush administration voice. Anxious to find a counterweight to Bush through a European ally, Rorty poses a dichotomy which makes no sense to a thinking European. ‘The leaders of France, Benelux, Italy and Spain,’ he insists, ‘cannot postpone the choices they have to make: whether to accept the humiliating subservience that Washington hopes to impose on them, or to break free by formulating foreign policy initiatives to which Washington will react with incredulous outrage.’ This is a reformulation of Spinelli’s charge: that anything other than outright opposition to the policies of George W Bush is to be a pawn of US strategy.

Sixth, all of these essays were written before the 2005 referenda in France and Holland which rejected the European Constitution. The harsh light of those votes, projected backwards, shows how unquestioned was the assumption that the matter of people voting was a mere formality. ‘The future constitution will grant us (Europeans) a foreign minister,’ write Habermas and Derrida (as if its passage was a matter of course) before going on to discuss the lack of powers bequeathed to the office – ‘what good is a new political office if governments don’t unify in a common policy? A Fischer with a changed job description would remain as powerless as (Xavier) Solana (whose office as foreign affairs commissioner to the European Commission CHK gives him little authority beyond his ability to persuade).’

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Habermas/Derrida can't be blamed for their mistake: almost everyone assumed, two years before the event, that 'traditionally pro-European' countries like France and the Netherlands would return their customary assent to whatever project was proposed for closer European integration.

The referenda results have caused a visible crisis in the European institutions. A short time after they took place, I heard Gunter Verheugen, the European Commission vice-president, talk to a small gathering in Dresden: it was the speech of a man, born in Germany at the end of the war and spending much of his life in the Social Democratic Party, whose politics and public morality had been framed by the construction of Europe as a state empowered by a vision of the end of nationalism and the gradual expansion of a peaceful zone – but who had just seen that vision hit a wall. The vision had not disintegrated: and Verheugen would, later in the year, come up with a plan for re-animating the Constitution under a new guise. But it had met a most unwelcome traveller on its way: voters, voting not as 'us Europeans', but as French and Dutch voting *against* 'them Europeans.'

The vision of a country called Europe

Core Europe is a seductive concept. It is the view that the original founders of the European Community – Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, together with later but enthusiastic members like Spain, can and should drive forward the pace of integration – politely leaving the door open to the laggard nations like the UK, Sweden and the still immature nations to the east. This has historical sense: the UK and the others have often lagged, but have tended, in the end, to go along with the 'core.' The concept owes its origin to a position paper produced in 1994 for the main party of the German right, the CDU, by Karl Lamers, the foreign policy advisor, and Wolfgang Schauble, the former Party chairman. It has not become less seductive, at least to some, even after the referenda: in an interview in *La Repubblica* on 13 December, the former President of the European Commission and present leader of the Italian Union of the Left, Romano Prodi, said that 'the new impetus can only come from Italy, France, Germany, Spain and more generally from those countries that have joined the euro.' Asked if this could mean a Europe without the UK, Prodi answered: 'Yes, if necessary.'

In this volume, Professor Wehler, with other contributors, strongly agrees with Habermas/Derrida and Prodi that a 'core Europe' must now be the engine. Wehler is here both coherent and clear – more clear, in fact, than Habermas who, like many

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Euro-federalists, tends to blur the hard issue of how far a Europe with the ambition to become a state must keep out those states which might wish to join Europe. Wehler defines the permissible boundaries of his Europe as the border of the old Soviet Union.

White Russia (Belarus), the Ukraine (which has already introduced a parliamentary and governmental resolution to join the EU by 2011), Moldova, Russia itself and Turkey in particular have never been part of historic Europe. They do not live off the legacy of Judaic, Greek or Roman antiquity that is present in Europe to this day. They have not fought their way through the far-reaching separation of state and church, and have even returned, as they did after the Bolshevik or Kemalist intermezzo, to a symbiotic relationship between the two. They have not experienced any reformation and even more importantly, hardly any 'enlightenment.' They have produced no European bourgeoisie, no autonomous European bourgeois cities, no European nobility and no European peasantry. They have not participated in the greatest achievement of European political culture since the later 19th century: the construction of the social welfare state. Cultural divergences are deeply engraved in Europe. Orthodox Christendom still differs greatly from a Protestant and Roman Catholic Europe that also remains separated from the Islam of Turkey by an obvious cultural barrier.

Not to recognise these divergences, Wehler believes, could lead to a 'frightening alternative ... a gigantic free-trade zone from the Atlantic to Vladivostok, from Lapland to the Turkish-Iraqi border. It would mean renouncing, or more specifically betraying, the great project of Europe's political unity that is supposed to gradually emerge from the avant-garde preparatory work of "core Europe." It would imply the loss of Europe's political agency, its own interwoven interests, its own competitive currency and the dependability of Europe's global influence.'

This vision, if exclusive (as all nation states are), is precise: and it is the fruit of a political programme which has little resonance in the UK. It is essentially the product of intellectuals and politicians who saw in the nation states of Europe the cause of perennial conflict; and who held that their abolition and replacement with 'an ever closer Union' would break the vicious cycles of centuries – and especially of the first half of the 20th century. The vision was both fine and inspired: but it has not worked and it won't, at least not in the short or medium term. The fear of intra European war has greatly diminished. That is the EU's past success, but it

is also a cause of its present failure. Implicitly, Habermas/Derrida, and those who stand with them on core Europe, recognise this. *They seek to substitute opposition to America for a diminishing fear of intra-European war as the motor force of a country called Europe.* The need for Europe, as against Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain etc, to be a unified actor on the world stage stems from a growing sense that America must be counterbalanced, and sometimes opposed, diplomatically, of course, rather than militarily.

The Other Europe

A large merit of this collection is that it includes a great deal of comment which takes issue with Habermas/Derrida. Dieter Grimm, a constitutional lawyer who is Rector of Berlin's Institute of Advanced Study, says the elements which would be used to deepen Europe's political integration would be the values of democracy and human rights – precisely those values we share with the US. Jurgen Kraube, a journalist with the FAZ, makes the same point when he writes 'to catalogue social justice as an exclusively European idea would be a case of continental self-righteousness.' Best of all is the joint response of the British writer Timothy Garton Ash and the Anglo-German scholar and politician, Ralf (Lord) Dahrendorf. Their refutation of Habermas/Derrida's central charge against the US is worth quoting at length:

The renewal of Europe is necessary. But this will never be accomplished by an endeavoured self-determination of Europe as un- or even anti-American. Each attempt to define Europe vis-à-vis the United States will not unify Europe but divide it. The history of the Iraq crisis has shown this all too clearly. Habermas interprets the demonstrations of February 15 as a unanimous response of the European peoples to 'those declarations of loyalty towards Bush' which eight heads of government and state, led by Jose Maria Aznar and Tony Blair, had declared shortly beforehand. This interpretation is misleading in three respects: firstly, because the demonstrations were not in fact a reaction to the 'letter of the eight'; secondly, because that letter – signed by statesmen not known for their obsequiousness, such as Vaclav Havel – was more a recognition of Western values and transatlantic relations than a recognition of George W Bush; and thirdly because the letter was born as a reaction to the French-German unilateral effort against a second UN resolution. Thus the venture of an 'avant garde core Europe' did not unite Europe, but divide it.

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The alternative is the Europe which Britain has traditionally spoken for: states with links much deeper than those of free trade, but far short of the creation of a unified state, with the location of the democratic mandate still largely, and for the foreseeable future, in the parliaments and law courts of the nation. Largely is the key (Euro sceptics would say weasel) word here. European legislation accounts for an increasing amount of British law. Though put before, and debated by, parliament, much of it – this is the fault of the news media as much as any other institution – is little scrutinised, debated or even clarified. In the UK at least, the direction which the politics of Europe is likely to take is deepening scepticism – quite different from hostility, or a movement to ‘pull out of Europe’ – towards further integrationist moves. The new and presently popular Conservative leader, David Cameron, is in the Tory euro sceptic mould; the probable next Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, has been the chief block within the Labour government to the UK joining the Euro; and the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, though the most pro-EU Prime Minister of Britain since Edward Heath, has now articulated (see his speech to the European parliament in June of 2005) a position of support for economic reform which increases the chances for fuller employment and of competitiveness in Europe, but explicitly brings down the shutters on further integration. (Blair’s speech was preceded by one from the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, widely welcomed, of undisguised hostility to Blair.)

Still, New Labour’s policy of friendly cooperation within a non-federalist framework is presently winning out. The Charlemagne column, in *The Economist*, delivered a corrective to the received wisdom that Britain’s presidency of Europe in the latter half of 2005 had been a failure, when it wrote (December 17 2005) that Blair:

has transformed Britain’s position in Europe. The much-derided British presidency succeeded in salvaging the EU’s faltering commitment to beginning formal entry negotiations with Turkey – something of great strategic importance that possibly no other country could or would have done. Above all, the long term, British strategy of enlarging the Union at the expense of further integration has been a triumph for patience and persistence. While the budget wrangling has temporarily strained relations with the new eastern members, they know that no major country has done more to bring them into the Union or extend full rights of membership than Blair’s Britain. The idea of France and Germany as the motor of an ever-deepening Union has been dealt a lasting blow. France’s rejection of the

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European constitution was a cry of pain against the Europe that Mr Blair has helped to construct.

There thus appears to be two alternatives for a functioning 'Europe.' One is that which Wehler, more clearly than Habermas/Derrida, sketches out: a Europe which does become ever closer, and which takes on, incrementally but determinedly, more and more of the attributes of a nation – a common economic and taxation policy to complement the common currency; a common foreign policy and diplomatic service; a unified military; and the subsequent development of a European demos. As Hans Ulrich Wehler puts it: 'European politics needs that kind of advance in trust which Bismarck, who was quite familiar with the great variety of German traditions, expressed when he stated that Germany would have to be put in the saddle first; after that, it would gradually learn how to ride on its own.' Putting Europe in the saddle is concluding a nation state called Europe before there is a democratic mandate to do so – prompted, presumably, by the fear that there may never be. The French and Dutch referenda, however, have shown that this would be an exceptionally dangerous and irresponsible decision. It would, to use the comment Joseph Stalin made about enforcing communism in Poland, be like putting a saddle on a cow. This observation did not, of course, cause Stalin to stop trying. And presumably, in his view, succeeding. But the consequences of 'success' might give pause to politicians who work in a democratic polity and who think on a far less brutal scale.

The Habermas/Derrida statement is in the tradition of the grand declaration in defence of a project already identified as necessary – in this case, the construction of a European state. For Habermas/Derrida a particular urgency has been injected into that project by the hegemony of the US, seen as particularly oppressive because of the British-American decision to invade Iraq. The statement operates in the service of a large idea whose completion history has posed as a necessary project: the creation of a state which, as they write, must take 'the form of governance beyond the nation state, which could set a precedent in the post-national constellation.'

This is a beguiling and an attractive vision, but only if it remains a vision: and it is, indeed, possible to imagine this form of governance acting as a 'precedent' in such diverse regions as the NAFTA (Canada-Mexico-US) countries; the Mercosud (CHK SPLG) countries in South America; the former Soviet states, most of which are already grouped in the Commonwealth of Independent States – and, with a rather greater exercise of imagination, in parts of East Asia, the Middle East and

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Africa. Yet once the existing groupings are examined, what becomes evident is as much centrifugal as centripetal tendencies. NAFTA is unlikely to take on a political dimension, since neither Canada nor Mexico wish to give up sovereignty to the US (nor, of course, vice versa); the Mercosud states have sometimes severe tensions among themselves; and the two main members of the CIS, Russia and Ukraine, are currently further apart (after the 'Orange Revolution') than they have ever been. Indeed, this last state of affairs is partly because of the magnetic attraction of Europe for the present Ukrainian administration, which is controlled by those who see the future of their chronically politically and ethnically divided country as better linked with its European west than with its Russian east – a fact which stokes the present strongly running tide of Russian nationalism and authoritarianism.

The Policy Network

There is, strangely enough, a Third Way – between an open or implicit Euro federalism (whether or not based, as with Habermas/Derrida, on an anti-American epiphany) and left- or right-Euro-rejectionism. It lies in the thickening and implementation of the decisions the EU has already taken. These are of central importance – not just in their substance, but in their execution. Any government must largely be judged, by its electorate, on how far it fulfils its mandate. For example, the next important elections in Europe, the Italian general election in April, will largely be based on how far Silvio Berlusconi has delivered on his promise to improve Italy's economy: with the left confident that it can show he has failed. Yet the same criteria are not applied to Europe: and that cannot but be a large element of the lack of faith which European electors have in the European institutions. Europe must address the central economic issues which beset it – and in doing so, provide a functioning practice for cooperation at a supra-national level and coordinated action at a national level.

Largely unnoticed in the coverage of the British presidency, a network of European intellectuals has been constructing a defence of the European identity and practice in precisely that area which Wehler identified as the most important achievement of European political culture—the welfare state or, as it has come to be known, the European social model—as an alternative road to the 'renewal of Europe.' The work of this network—organised by the Blairite Policy Network institute and headed by the British sociologist and former director of the London School of Economics, Anthony (Lord) Giddens—is a counter weight to the Habermas/Derrida intervention. Where the latter proceeded, in its form and substance, from

the Franco-German alliance which had been the powerhouse of Europe, this one brings together a loose federation of scholars, policy aides and politicians from most of the European states, including the smaller ones – drawn together by the assiduous identification, by Policy Network, of those in universities, think tanks and ministerial cabinets who share, very broadly indeed, a common approach which had been known as ‘Third Way-ist’ – a project particularly identified with Giddens – and now known, when a name has to be given to it, as ‘progressive governance.’

The Policy Network project initiative, also a product of intellectuals, is cut from a different cloth from that of the Habermas/Derrida project. Generally friendly to the EU, it has no teleological purpose: rather, it bases itself on the already-declared ambitions of Europe, and has an implicitly incremental, suck-it-and-see bias. One such ambition is the general aim – implicit in the phrase ‘the European social model’ – of developing and retaining welfare systems which are sustained by, soften the impact of, and are compatible with, a successful capitalism. The other is the particular project, known as the Lisbon agenda, which is, essentially, the rapid modernisation of European industry, services, education and social provisions in order to remain competitive with an innovative North America to the west, and the renascent India and China to the east. In a talk to a meeting of leading members of the Network in London in early December, Giddens described the challenge in stark terms. Europe, he said – with many heavy problems already weighing on its social model, especially that of demography – now has to realise that it had, since the identification of the Lisbon Agenda in 2000 (CHK), not caught up with, but fallen further behind, the US in such key indicators as technological innovation, education standards and, of course, productivity. Karl Aiginger, director of the Austrian Institute of Social Research, later amplified Giddens’ figures – pointing out, in a paper presented to the meeting, that one reason for the divergence is that Europe has, on average, a high and rising tax-and-spend regime, and the US a relatively low and falling one. Government expenditure (on the latest OECD figures) in the US is 29.5 per cent, as against 45.3 per cent in Europe. In the last 15 years, this difference has widened to the present 16 per cent from 10 per cent, with taxation rising by 2.5 per cent in Europe while it has decreased by 4.5 per cent in the US.

As for China and India, Giddens said, they were already competing in the knowledge economy in the 1990s – but had now emerged with a model of their own: a low wage/high education model, which was increasingly rapidly attracting investment, jobs and technology: 222 large corporations now outsource to India: Boeing’s new

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airliner is being in large part designed in Bangalore. This was not, as he stressed, a call for a neo-liberalism which would strip down the expensive social model to render workers leaner and fitter to compete with their would-be replacements to the far east (to say nothing of the famously lean, fit and cheap Polish plumbers to their near east). Rather it was a refurbishing of the social model as a necessary support to competitiveness – which, in turn, would be a necessary support to the social model.

Highly educated and materially ambitious masses working for low wages – whether inside or outside of the borders of the EU – are hard to cope with: if we don't, Europe is likely to become mired in zero sum games of import tariffs and immigration barriers. This economic challenge will not wait on the completion of a European integration project which has no realistic chance in the short and medium terms; the problems of the European social model – actually, national welfare systems of quite widely differing kinds which are not only European, are more than social and cannot be models – had to be tackled by individual states, with the Commission acting mainly as a best practice clearing house.

The December meeting of the network provided a contrast with Habermas/Derrida in this, also: it was admiring, rather than contemptuous, of contemporary USA, even while insisting that the European preference for social provision, at the cost of higher taxes, was a superior system in the long run. In a sobering paper for the conference, Luc Soete, the Belgian scholar of business innovation and technology, argued that the German/Japanese 'social industrial' model – in which large corporations both provided extensive safety nets, more or less lifetime employment and ran large research efforts – was now increasingly inflexible and was, at least in its fully fledged form, disappearing. Basic research is now only done by a handful of corporations, usually in the chemical/pharmaceutical and software sectors: otherwise, it is moving into universities. In any case, the nature of research was changing: much of modern innovation is done without substantial research. In all of these developments, the Lisbon agenda lagged, still having an 'industrial' model of research. In the European labour market (as in the North American), Soete noted a new kind of dualism between those for whom work was an unwelcome but necessary way of making a living, and those for whom work was a large and satisfying part of life. The former wanted to retire as early as possible with as high pensions as possible; the latter often didn't want to retire at all. To address the European lags in innovation and research, and the inability of European states to cope with a dual labour market, Soete called for a radical revision of the Lisbon agenda, and

pointed out that it was the nation state, and not Europe, which would have to do the addressing. John Sutton, of the London School of Economics, was typical of the group in calling attention to the rising cost of doing business in Europe, not because of 'Brussels bureaucrats' but because of increased regulation (as in the UK); high non-wage costs (in Germany) and the 35-hour week (in France). Europe, he said, had a tendency to follow false trails, such as opposition to outsourcing, and a resistance to bringing in highly skilled immigrants.

These issues – and many others – are not the stuff that dreams are made of. Instead, they are the stuff of Europe as it is – the endlessly detailed, often tedious, work of technical, academic, bureaucratic groups and individuals, seeking to coordinate across a particularly complex series of levels of political decision-making. Compare the declarations of Habermas/Derrida with the research of the Network policy thinkers. One camp, carried on a mixture of horror and elation, is proposing a much faster and deeper integration of Europe than has so far proved possible (or than is even seen as desirable by many governments, or now, it seems, the people). The other camp, implicitly critical of the grander vision, engages in detailed policy work and recommendations which are awkwardly conscious of how little 'Europe' has done when common action was required.

The dead-end of Anti-Americanism

Habermas and Derrida write that if the idea of closer unity in a Europe 'that can be shaped together' has not been put on the agenda, then 'it is we intellectuals who have failed.' That is wrong: the federalist case, 'ever closer union', has been on the agenda, and has been frequently voiced by leading politicians: indeed, it is the official aim, even now, of the European Union. Intellectuals fail, not by keeping it off the agenda but by proposing it in the form Habermas/Derrida did – as an anti-American gesture. Us Europeans cannot exploit a caricature of the new world to solve the problems of the old: for America is not responsible for the real issues which face us. The fault, that we are underlings, lies not with the US, but with ourselves. Fortunately, some intellectuals are proving themselves useful in seeking to remedy the fault.

John Lloyd is contributing editor at the *Financial Times*. He is an advisory editor of *Democratiya* and author of *What the Media Are Doing to Our Politics* (Constable, 2004).