

## *Editor's Page*

**Alan Johnson**

In a wide-ranging interview **Mary Kaldor** argues that peace and human rights are the twin foundations of a progressive foreign policy. She maps the terrain of contemporary politics: as she sees it, a global mismatch between the 'militarised unilateralist character of American power' and the new global socio-economic reality ushered in by the shocks of globalisation and the end of the Cold War, the spreading virus of 'new wars,' the crises of humanitarian interventionism, the disastrous consequences of the 'war on terror' and the Iraq conflict. Kaldor also set out her positive alternative – a cosmopolitan political project based on the rise of a global civil society and the doctrine of human security. She answers criticisms of her work as relativist and pacifist.

Democratiya advisory editor, **Nick Cohen's** brilliant best-seller, *What's Left? How The Left Lost Its Way*, has been re-issued by Harper Perennial, and we are delighted to publish the new Postscript.

**Anja Havedal** reviews *Afghan Women* by Elahesh Rostami-Povey. Writing from Kabul, Havedal critiques the book as a symptom of some intellectual maladies of the left.

According to Rostami-Povey (a lecturer in development studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London) the assistance community in Afghanistan is 'obviously there as part of the big imperial agenda.' That agenda is clear enough: 'With the US invasion came poverty, rural-to-urban migration, uprooting, crime, drug addiction, unemployment, alien culture.' The elected Afghan government has 'subjugated the needs of the majority of the people to the imperial interests of the USA.' All in all, 'An alien imperialist culture and prefabricated identity wrapped in the rhetoric of "security, development, women's liberation and democracy" has [sic] been imposed on Afghan women and men alike.'

Havedal, a member of the aid community in Afghanistan, responds powerfully. '*Afghan Women* does not represent the women I have come to know here, strong women who challenge patriarchy and stereotypes by studying and pursuing careers. Women who want their daughters to become doctors, run for office and make their own decisions. Women who want their husbands, like mine, to cook dinner from

time to time. The Afghan women in Rostami-Povey's book, on the contrary, are bitter and cynical. They 'hate' foreigners and feel oppressed by everything Western; some even imply that life was better under Taliban rule. And they all agree with the author's raging anti-Western, 'anti-everything' tirade. It is safe to assume that Rostami-Povey conceived the story of *Afghan Women* long before visiting Afghanistan; when she eventually did so, it was in search of suitable quotes. The result is a book that speaks not for Afghan women, but for the parts of the left that – in the words of *Democratiya's* mission statement – 'have backed themselves into an incoherent and negativist 'anti-imperialist' corner, losing touch with long-held democratic, egalitarian and humane values.'

Something more than the merits of one book are at stake here. Fundamental choices of analysis and sensibility face the Western left and Western feminism – choices framed by Rostami-Povey and Havedal.

We are very pleased to carry an English translation of **Dick Howard's** 1998 laudatio for the French social theorist Claude Lefort, a thinker who has stared down the tragedies of the twentieth century left in order to renew the radical-democratic tradition. Howard sums up Lefort's insight: 'If totalitarianism is not understood and criticized from inside – i.e. as the denial of the indeterminability and differences on which democracy is, so to speak, founded – then one cannot have a correct understanding of the radical potential of democracy. A democracy that is fully realized once and for all does not exist; however, a democracy that renews itself continually remains our possibility, but also our challenge.'

The military code of 'sucking it up' has long been compared to the austere philosophy of Stoicism – many modern warriors have found solace and guidance in the writings of the ancients Epictetus and Seneca. While defending the continuing merits of an Aristotelian approach, **Carrie-Ann Biondi** is warmly appreciative of Nancy Sherman's *Stoic Warriors: The Ancient Philosophy behind the Military Mind* which explores the benefits and the costs of Stoicism for the military man or woman. Sherman advocates a 'moderate,' 'gentle' Stoicism in which control is tempered with forgiveness and the warrior drive is balanced with humility and humour. Biondi explores Sherman's applications of Stoicism to questions of the body, anger, fear, resilience, and grieving.

**Rob Jenkins** reviews *Barriers to Democracy: The Other Side of Social Capital in Palestine and the Arab World* by Amaney A. Jamal. One of the orthodoxies of democracy-promotion is the privileged role given to civil society as the key to the

dilemmas of sequential democratization. According to Jenkins, this orthodoxy receives 'a devastating body blow' from Jamal, who – after research in the territory governed during the 'Oslo period' of 1993-1999 by the Palestinian National Authority – concluded that boosting 'civil society' can make democratisation more difficult to achieve. Jenkins sums up Jamal's case: 'Associations operating under the conditions that prevail in many developing countries – even those that are merely 'semi-authoritarian' rather than completely autocratic – may not only not contribute to democratization; in such circumstances, the proliferation of civic associations might actually make things worse. Civil society in non-democratic contexts can inculcate attitudes and behaviours that undercut the creation of a democratic culture.' Tony Blair take note.

**Irfan Khawaja** reviews Larry May's *War Crimes and Just War*, the second volume of a projected multivolume set on the philosophical foundations of international criminal law (the first volume was reviewed by Norman Geras in *Democratiya 3* and an exchange about the review between May and Geras appeared in *Democratiya 4*). In a sharp, closely argued and passionate critique Khawaja finds the reasonableness of the book's tone 'at odds with the utter unreasonableness of its claims,' as well as 'its nearly complete failure to deal responsively with obvious objections.' The adequacy – as theory or guide to action – of the 'contingent pacifism' which May seems to argue for is subject to a comprehensive rebuttal from Khawaja.

**David Zarnett** contributed a clear-sighted critique of Edward Said's writings on the Iranian Revolution to *Democratiya 9*. In this issue he subjects Said's writings on the first Iraq war of 1991 and the Kosovan conflict of 1999 to a textually scrupulous critical mauling. *Democratiya* believes Zarnett's writings are an important resource. The smell of incense hangs around assessments of Said's intellectual legacy and few have faced the question Zarnett poses: does Said's work contribute to or hinder the realization of an improved international order? Any challenge to Zarnett's conclusion – '[Said's] all-consuming commitment to denounce American actions rendered him ill-equipped to deal substantively with fascist crimes, whether Iraqi or Serbian' – will have to deal with the exhaustive case made here.

**Ian Roxborough** reviews *Terror, Insurgency, and the State: Ending Protracted Conflicts* by Marianne Heiberg, Brendan O'Leary and John Tirman (eds.) – a systematic comparison of eleven recent insurgencies, with the aim of find out what sorts of policies work to defuse insurgencies, and which do not. Roxborough also takes a look at *Understanding Global Terror*, by Christopher Ankersen (ed.), and invites us to

question 'the very nature of a postulated "global war on terror," and the claim that we are now living in an age of global terror.' He suggests 'a deflation of rhetoric is sorely needed.'

**Sasha Breger** reviews Bret Benjamin's *Invested Interests: Capital, Culture and the World Bank* which promises a more 'sophisticated' analysis of the World Bank by understanding it as a 'cultural as well as an economic institution.'

"I am not a man of letters," wrote Jawaharlal Nehru in one of his missives from jail to his daughter Indira, but of course he was.' So begins Chandrachud Choudhury's sparkling essay about Nehru as a writer of English prose. Choudhury defends his claim that the newly published *Oxford India Nehru* shows the first Indian Prime Minister to have been 'one of the best Indian prose writers of the twentieth century.'

'A book on the Right is a welcome thing because so much of the contemporary intellectual Left prefers to either memorialise its radical past or to specialise in cultural questions rather than examine why its ideals have been defeated and how this might be changed, says **David McKnight** in his review of Michael J. Thompson's edited volume *The New Conservatism*. He finds much of value in the collection – not least Thompson's analysis of conservatism's ability to 'weave a new public philosophy' and Bronner's suggestive essay about what a left version of that public philosophy might look like. However, McKnight (whose own ideas have influenced the newly victorious Australian Labour Party) criticises the lack of a serious discussion of the economic ideas of the new conservatives, along with the tendency of some contributors to wild exaggeration (Philip Green's talk of a 'proto-totalitarian moment' in US politics, for instance) and to talk of powerful right-wing foundations rather than grappling with the intellectual substance of neoconservatism.

**Neil Robinson** reviews *Communism and the emergence of democracy* by Harald Wydra. Robinson welcomes Wydra's ambition: to use the resources of critical social theory to examine the end of communism and what has followed in Eastern Europe and the former USSR. However, he finds much to criticise in Wydra's delivery, arguing that the too-easy dismissal of the comparative politics literature on democratisation and 'transitology,' the scatter-gun references to a parade of social theorists and the absence of a sense of the rich empirical reality of communism and its aftermath, combine to make for missed opportunity.

**Fred Siegel** reviews three books about *Islamism* – *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* by Mark Lilla, *The Suicide of Reason: Radical Islam's Threat to the West*, by Lee Harris, and *Jihad and Jew-Hatred: Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11*, by Matthias Kuntzel. Siegel takes issue with Lilla's nomination of Tariq Ramadan as a candidate to lead a renovated Islam. Siegel points out that Ramadan is 'a reactionary modernist who hopes not to modernize Islam but to Islamicize modernity.' Siegel's endorsement of Lee Harris's call for a more energetic defence of Western values is tempered by his critique of Harris's seeming call for a counter-fanaticism. This is, he points out, 'exactly the argument of those who, during World War II and the cold war, insisted that we could only win by becoming much more like our enemies. They were wrong then, and Harris, and Lilla in a different way, are mistaken now; we are far less fragile than such pessimists assume.' Extending his congratulations to Telos Press for publishing Matthias Kuntzel's 'deeply informative' book, Siegel praises its exploration of 'the deep and entangling historical ties between European National Socialism and the Muslim Brotherhood.'

Is it possible that Democrats might blow the 2008 election? Al Gore's former Communications Director, **Larry Haas**, thinks so. He points out that 'In a post-9/11 world, national security is the hurdle that presidential candidates must clear, a kind of litmus test of seriousness.' Yet, despite the victories of the surge in Iraq, Democrats seem to be invested in defeat. 'More than ever, the party is controlled by a new and stridently anti-military "iron triangle" of multi-million-dollar donors, grassroots groups led by moveon.org, and leftist bloggers led by the Daily Kos.' The narrative pushed by this 'iron triangle' is carried in 'lite' form across the mass media and Hollywood and Democrats are convinced it will carry them to victory in 2008. But as the success of the surge becomes ever clearer, the 'iron triangle' has 'opened a gap between Democrats and reality and, more important politically, between Democrats and the public.' Haas warns that 'As Americans increasingly recognize the progress, they will grow increasingly distrustful of a political party that refuses to do so, and that refuses to consider the consequences of allowing al-Qaeda to escape defeat, reconstitute itself in Iraq, and, with Iran's help, turn Iraq into a safe haven for terrorism.'

**Ophelia Benson** reviews *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out*, edited by Ibn Warraq – a collection of testimonies from 'apostates' of Islam. She finds the collection deeply disturbing: 'The reader gasps for air in a closed world filled with hatred, force, and boasting. One doesn't want to think that, one would much rather think that "normal" Islam is relatively free and benevolent and only political Islam is coercive

and dogmatic – but when reading these experiences of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis and Iranians, that hope is hard to sustain.'

**Michael Kleinman** works in Iraq for an organization implementing a USAID development program. His poignant 'Letter from Iraq' captures the chaos, and the hope, of Iraq. He pays tribute to the bravery of the many Iraqis trying to build a new democracy and he calls for a political surge to accompany the military surge: 'political progress and institution building are not mere theoretical abstractions, but the difference between surviving the daily commute to work, or not.'

**Jacques Roumani** sings the praises of Michael B. Oren's 'magisterial' best seller *Power, Faith, and Fantasy. America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present*. In place of crude conspiracy stories about America's history in the Middle East, Oren offers 'a paradigmatically different perspective, by providing a comprehensive 230-year history of a complex relationship that actually began with the founding of the United States in 1776.' The result is a reminder that 'the United States and the Middle East have become inextricably interdependent through a multifaceted relationship, deeply anchored in the history of the United States since its very founding.' For Roumani this is 'history at its best, well documented but rendered with flair and a lucid storytelling style.'

The lost world of New York social democratic antitotalitarianism is featured in several pieces. The 'tough liberalism' of teacher union leader **Albert Shanker** is recalled by **Eugenia Kemble**, who reviews Richard Kahlenberg's new biography, while the archive section features **Tom Kahn's** tribute to the anti-Stalinist intellectual **Max Shachtman**, and **Rachelle Horowitz's** moving account of the life and ideas of her comrade Tom Kahn.

A product of the same milieu, **Joshua Muravchik**, is interviewed about his political odyssey from socialism to neoconservatism. Always fiercely anti-Stalinist, Muravchik's disillusionment with the left began with his counter-rebellion against the left's rebellion against anti-Communism, and it grew with his conviction that the seed of totalitarianism lay in socialism's promise of 'heaven on earth.' We discuss how neoconservatism was reconstituted after the Cold War as 'a mindset distinct from that of traditional conservatives or liberals' and explore why that mindset, rather than the machinations of a cabal, gave the neocons great influence after 9/11. Self-critical about the neocons' role in the Iraq war – 'I am prepared to concede error on Iraq – certainly in the execution and perhaps even in the decision

to do it' – Muravchik explains why, nonetheless, 'those expecting the imminent demise of "neoconservatism" are in for a disappointment.' Three common criticisms – that neoconservatives are warmongers, lying Straussians and a Jewish cabal – are considered.

### A word on neoconitis

Democratiya does not push a narrow party line. Still, perhaps a word of explanation is warranted for the inclusion of a neoconservative interviewee. There is the good reason – the intrinsic value in having an erudite and serious neoconservative critically reviewing the origins, development and current state of his own tendency. But there is also, to complete Thomas Carlyle's couplet, the real reason. Our intellectual culture suffers from 'neoconitis' and we badly need a cure. The disease was diagnosed by Roger Cohen writing in *The New York Times*:

[N]eocon has morphed into an all-purpose insult for anyone who still believes that American power is inextricable from global stability and still thinks the muscular anti-totalitarian U.S. interventionism that brought down Slobodan Milošević has a place. (...) [N]eoconitis, a condition as rampant as liberal-lampooning a few years back, has left scant room for liberal hawks. 'Neocon is an insult used to obliterate the existence of [the] liberal position,' says Paul Berman, a writer often so insulted. (...) That makes Václav Havel and Adam Michnik and Kanan Makiya and Bernard Kouchner neocons, among others who don't think like Norman Podhoretz but have more firsthand knowledge of totalitarian hell than countless slick purveyors of the neocon insult.

Neoconitis is now an obstacle to grown-up political debate on the decent left. It renders invisible the liberal / social democratic antitotalitarian position. It keeps many stuck inside the Pilger-Chomsky-Moore-Moveon bubble. It stops others being as bold as they need to be in promoting democracy, opposing tyranny, projecting force – of ideas or arms – against Islamist terrorism, and making urgent solidarity with democrats in the Middle East. It makes us intellectually lazy, reducing the debate about Iran, for example, to one more exercise in knee-jerk anti-Westernism. And it takes the complexities of the unresolved national question between the Israelis and the Palestinians and makes of them a cartoon drawn by a conspiracy nut, opening the door to the dead-end politics of demonisation and boycott rather than mutual recognition and peace.

Examples of neoconitis abound. Consider Seumas Milne, the former editor of *The Guardian* Comment pages (which he turned into the fons et origo of many of the ideas that have led the left astray, prompting one blogger to establish The Seumas Milne Trophy for Relativist Crap). Milne dismissed Ed Husain's 2007 book *The Islamist* – a penetrating account of extremism in UK Islamist networks – by attacking its author as a 'poster-boy for the neocons.' Another example of neoconitis was the reaction of the Muslim Council of Britain in October 2007 to the finding by a think tank, Policy Exchange, that antisemitic and anti-western hate literature was on sale at a quarter of UK Mosques. The MCB dismissed the research as just another one of those 'transparent attempts to try and delegitimise popular mainstream Islamic institutions in the UK and replace them with those who are subservient to neo-conservative aims.'

Too long have those who spread neoconitis enjoyed the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought. Neoconservatism is not a conspiracy. As an influential school of foreign policy it has roots in that part of the Democratic Party which refused to follow George McGovern and Jimmy Carter in their embrace of détente and their abandonment of antitotalitarianism in the 1970s. Our differences with neoconservatism may be many, but neoconservatism can only be excised from the history of the eclipse of cynical Kissengerian realism and the rise of democracy-promotion – two preconditions for any 'progressive foreign policy' – by doing violence to the historical record. In that sense there is an overlap of sorts with the liberal and social-democratic antitotalitarian traditions, and we should have the self-confidence to establish *for ourselves* our points of contact with, and our critical distance from, neoconservatism.

Readers may be interested to know a collection of the Democratiya interviews is being published by The Foreign Policy Centre. *Global Politics After 9/11: The Democratiya Interviews* (2007) can be ordered from the Foreign Policy Centre. <http://fpc.org.uk/>

Finally, we publish a letter from **The International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions** about the murder of Hassan Hamza, an Iraqi trade union leader, and urge readers to visit the website of the General Federation of Iraqi Workers and consider donating. <http://www.iraqitradeunions.org/en/>