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## **Globalisation, war and New Labour**

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# Globalisation, war and New Labour

*Whatever way you examine it, the intense globalisation of the capitalist economy has run into serious crisis. This is the explanation behind both the growing threat of a unilateral attack on Iraq by the US and Britain and, at the same time, an emerging trade war between the United States and Europe.*

*By Paul Feldman, the Editor*

**G**lobalisation has not resulted in capitalism overcoming the essential contradictions that lie at the heart of its economic and political system, as New Labour and others would have us believe. These concerns, principally, over-production, the anarchy of the free market, the relentless drive for profits, the wastage of resources, the dominance of credit and the contrast of all this with nation state structures and the highly socialised nature of the economy and society.

On the contrary, the globalisation process has intensified these inner tensions to bursting point. This is the background to plans for a wilful war against Iraq by the leading political representatives of global capital – Bush in the White House and Blair in Downing Street.

The September 11 attacks on the United States came at a time when key parts of the global economy had already plunged into crisis. In America and Britain, the dot.com bubble had burst with a vengeance, leaving many small investors with severely burnt fingers. IT and communications corporations were experiencing a slump in sales and profits. The “new economy” was as flawed as the “old” one.

Japan, the second largest component of the world economy, was already in slump and on the edge of financial bankruptcy. Unemployment was mounting throughout Europe.

**T**he terror attacks on the World Trade Centre accelerated a process that was, therefore, well under way. Continuous expansion through capitalist globalisation had proved impossible to sustain and had also brought fierce resistance in countries like Indonesia, France and Italy.

September 11 represented a crude, mindless form of rejection of the impact of globalisation based on a religious outlook rooted in the middle ages. The attacks nevertheless constituted a violent assault on the world’s largest economy. Some estimates suggest that the cost to the US economy will be more than \$60bn.

That is why the “war on terror” has become synonymous with any perceived threat to the

dominance of the global corporations that trade across states and borders as the new masters of the universe. As one intelligence officer told *The Observer*: “The threat we are now facing in Europe and the US is the greatest threat to security and **economic interests** in the last 60-70 years.” (emphasis added).

Despite attempts to talk up the prospects for the global economy, matters have deteriorated in 2002. Argentina is bankrupt, and is in social turmoil. Japan’s crisis has deepened and the collapse of Enron shows that large sectors of capitalism are based on fiction, where auditors “certify” non-existent profits.

This is the content of the planned attack on Iraq, which could even involve nuclear weapons. An assault on Saddam Hussein is, of course, not about freeing the Iraqi people from a crude dictatorship. After all, it suited the major powers to support Iraq when it used chemical weapons in its horrific war with Iran.

**N**o, any attack is essentially about destroying a regime that is seen to stand in the way of the political conditions needed to protect and advance the interests of the global capitalist economy as a whole. The very existence of the regimes in Iraq, North Korea, Iran, China and Libya is seen as a threat primarily because each in their own way is outside the direct orbit of the “free market”.

The existence of “weapons of mass destruction” in some of the states is only another smokescreen put up by Bush and Blair. India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons but America has lifted any sanctions on them as a result of their support for the bombing of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the installation of a client regime. Israel too has nuclear weapons and invades Palestinian territory to kill civilians, doctors and children. Their murderous actions bring scarcely a peep from Bush or Blair.

Of the record increase in the US defence budget announced by Bush, only a fraction is devoted to anti-terrorism measures. Paul Krugman, an economist, told the *New York Times*: “The military’s build-up seems to

# what we think

have little to do with the actual threat, unless you think that al-Qaeda's next move will be a frontal assault by several heavy armoured divisions."

Analysts say that the total 2003 defence budget will be 11% higher than the average military expenditure during the Cold War and by 2007 will be 20% higher. The increases are to be paid for from cuts in federal health, social security and urban renewal programmes.

The next stage in the "war on terror" is equally about creating a hysteria at home to justify authoritarian rule in the US and Britain against domestic opponents of capitalist globalisation. Those demonstrating against European Union policies are already in line for arrest as "terrorists" under new regulations. Like those in the infamous Camp X-Ray and Belmarsh Prison in London, they too will be held without trial or charge.

In Britain, it is a wrong to characterise Blair as a poodle of the US government. The New Labour leader is actually the chief advocate internationally of both capitalist globalisation and the parallel "war on terror". His "civilisation" is the same as Bush's – the rule of the free market. New Labour is the management team for the global corporations operating in Britain. That is why Blair stands "shoulder to shoulder" with Bush, who fulfils the same role in America.

To oppose the coming war it is necessary to campaign for the defeat of New Labour and for a transfer of power from the corporations that finance and determine the government's priorities and policies. We must at all costs avoid a crude anti-American posture, which organisations like the Socialist Workers Party adopt for populist reasons.

The main enemy of all those who reject wars are the governments that order them and the big business interests that stand to gain from military action, not the people of the United States.

That is why it is also wrong to characterise the "war on terror" as an attack on Muslims and Islam. This misses the point about what is involved and suggests that there is a religious solution to the problems of the masses in these countries when there is not. The "war on terror" is essentially a class war against workers in every country.

The conditions for defeating New Labour are rapidly emerging. A number of trade unions have declared their reluctance to fund a party that is privatising public services and eroding rights in an alliance with the neo-fascist Italian leader, Berlusconi. The RMT's new leader Bob Crow has threatened to sever the relationship with New Labour. Even the TUC, that most respectable body, has warned New Labour of a potential "haemorrhaging of support".

This is against a background of a crisis

within the state itself, as seen in the conflicts between New Labour and the police, the political take-over of the civil service and the resistance of the judiciary and legal profession to what it sees as a threat to its independence and the rights of defendants to a fair trial. This is not to mention the continuing crisis in parliament, which serves only to interest the tourists as New Labour continues to bypass its procedures.

The plan to attack Iraq is not a sign of strength but of deep turmoil in the world economic system. Bush's decision to impose tariffs on imported steel and the EU's continued rejection of US farm produce are indications that globalisation within a capitalist framework is doomed.

Globalisation can in fact only succeed through co-operation, respect for diversity, protection of natural resources and equal relations between people and nations. The anarchy of global capitalism threatens us all instead with global war, environmental destruction and political dictatorship.

New Labour's authority is weakening. Polls show a majority reject an attack on Iraq. Our obligation is to campaign to remove the government from office and to construct new forms of political, social and economic rule based on a transfer of power from those who have proved incapable of wielding it for anything but their own crude interests. Help this aim by joining the Movement for a Socialist Future. ■



*The September 11 attack jolted the world economy*

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# The US media and the new garrison state

**Peter McLaren** shows how most of the American media are lapdogs of the Bush administration. They have played a key role in helping to promote growing authoritarian rule in the United States. McLaren is known worldwide for his educational activism and is the author of a number of books. His works have been translated into 12 languages. He is currently professor of the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles.

**T**onight President Bush was on television, speaking from China. He told an attentive Chinese audience that they had made progress towards democracy over the last 15 years. After all, as he pointed out, nowadays the Chinese don't all wear the same clothes: as part of the global marketplace, they now have free choice in terms of what they can wear.

I suppose this is good news for the fashion and apparel industry's free trade advocates. Today President Bush can make a fool of himself on national television and not be criticised. The terrorist attacks of September 11 – that cruel sabre wound across the cheekbones of history – have given Bush a cloak of Teflon; public criticism cannot stick. Once the brunt of jokes for his dyslexic “Bushisms”, he is now shielded from scathing criticism. After all, he is the newly anointed Hero of the Homeland.

Many of my friends and colleagues find it staggering that Bush and his administration can get away with turning the country into a garrison state in such a short time, and with the seeming consent of such a large segment of the US public. But when you begin to comprehend the enormous power and global reach of the US media, it becomes all the more understandable.

The media cartel of AOL Time Warner, Disney, General Electric, News Corporation, Viacom, Vivendi, Sony, Bertelsmann, AT&T, and Liberty Media do their best to ensure that the news media continue in their role as the lapdogs of the Bush administration and the military industrial complex. Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric (NBC's corporate parent) is an arch conservative; Michael Jordan, the head of CBS (Westinghouse) is a staunch conservative set against government regulation; Michael Eisner of Disney is a Democrat, but a political centrist; and Rupert Murdoch, who heads News Corporation (and owns Fox Television) is a right-winger.

In fact, right-wing conservatives dominate the three major opinion-shaping forms in the US: TV, talk radio, and syndicated columns. That, and the fact that the majority of public broadcasting outlets in the US rely on large corporate-backed think tanks to offer “expert”

opinions to their audiences, are just a few of the reasons why the United States population has been so willing to give up its long-cherished democratic freedoms for promises of security from bin Laden and his chthonic warriors.

According to Mark Crispin Miller:

The cartel's favourite audience... is that stratum of the population most desirable to advertisers – which has meant the media's complete abandonment of working people and the poor. And while the press must help protect us against those who would abuse the powers of government, the oligopoly is far too cosy with the White House and the Pentagon, whose faults, and crimes, it is unwilling to expose. The media's big bosses want big favours from the state, while the reporters are afraid to risk annoying their best sources....In short, the news divisions of the media cartel appear to work against the public interest – and **for** their parent companies, their advertisers and the Bush administration. The situation is completely un-American. It is the purpose of the press to help us run the state, and not the other way around. As citizens of a democracy, we have the right and obligation to be well aware of what is happening, both in “the homeland” and the wider world. Without such knowledge we cannot be both secure and free. We therefore must take steps to liberate the media from oligopoly, so as to make the government our own.

**O**ne of the primary ideological vehicles of the new garrison state is Fox News. Fox News Channel and 26 television stations are owned outright by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. Fox News is rapidly gaining a wide and committed audience on the basis of its appeal to right-wing male viewers. Its political catechism is spiked with testosterone and rage and gives ballast to the logic of transnational capitalism and US militarism.

James Wolcott aptly describes this gang as the “Viagra posse”:

Relatively subdued in the first weeks after September 11, Chris Matthews, Geraldo Rivera, and the Viagra posse of Fox News refilled their gasbags and began taking turns on Mussolini’s balcony to exhort the mob, their frog glands swelling like Dizzy Gillespie’s cheeks. Agitating for the insertion of ground troops, hothead hosts and like-minded guests (many of them retired military officers now getting a chance to coach from the sidelines) scoffed at the over reliance on airpower before doing a nimble back flip and complaining that we weren’t bombing enough, or in the right spots. Frustrated, indignant, and irate over the patty-cake pace of the Afghan campaign (talk shows serve strong coffee in the greenrooms), these masters of Stratego escalated their rhetorical heat as if hoping the bombing campaign would follow their lead, sounding riled enough to storm the fighter cockpit and get the job done themselves if these gutless wonders wouldn’t.



Peter McLaren

Watching Fox News, one is reminded of remarks made by Harold Lasswell in 1941, when he defined the garrison state as one in which “the specialists on violence are the most powerful group in society”. The corporate media have driven out any hope for even left-liberal news coverage or commentary. Labelled as “leftist” pundits, the likes of Sam Donaldson, Cokie Roberts, George Stephanopoulos, Bill Press, Michael Kinsley, Beckel, Margaret Carlson, Al Hunt, Mark Shields, David Broder, Juan Williams, and Susan Estrich are paraded before the American public as an attempt to balance right-wingers such as Limbaugh, Buckley, Novak, McLaughlin, Buchanan, Robertson, Liddy, and North. The truth is that the so-called “leftists” are, at their most extreme, centrists and more often than not tilt politically to the right. With virtually no leftist representation in the media, the US public are being ideologically massaged by opinions and positions that serve the interests of the ruling class. The myth of the liberal media talked about so much by right-wing pundits is simply a lie.

Take as one example, popular Fox Television commentator Bill O’Reilly. His mind rarely burdened by a dialectical thought, O’Reilly frequently berates with autocratic homilies those few guests he invites on his show who dare offer an explanation for the events of September 11. He enjoys sparing his audiences insight, and lifting from them the burden of comprehension,

preferring instead a spectacle of self-congratulatory belligerence and Stygian anger. The majesty of O’Reilly’s self-regard is propped up by a stubborn conviction that unsupported opinions presented in a mean-spirited fashion are preferable to complex analysis. Proud of his simple patriotic (i.e., warmongering) advice to kill the enemy because the enemy is evil, he admonishes anyone offering critical analysis as giving evil credibility and as comforting our enemies. On a September 17 segment of his show, *O’Reilly Factor*, our “no-spin” host Bill put forth a plan for action if the Taliban did not hand over bin Laden:

If they don’t, the US. should bomb the Afghan infrastructure to rubble – the airport, the power plants, their water facilities and the roads. This is a very primitive country. And taking out their ability to exist day to day will not be hard. Remember, the people of any country are ultimately responsible for the government they have. The Germans were responsible for Hitler. The Afghans are responsible for the Taliban. We should not target civilians. But if they don’t rise up against this criminal government, they starve, period.

O’Reilly also went on to say that the infrastructure of Iraq “must be destroyed and the population made to endure yet another round of intense pain”. He also disembarassed himself from any humanitarian sentiments by calling for the destruction of Libya’s airports and the mining of its harbours, crying: “Let them eat sand”. There is no spectacle of suddenly vanishing competence here, for his reasoning is as inexorably puerile as it is predictable. He is effectively asking for millions more Iraqi children and civilians to die at the hands of the United States (as if the US imposed sanctions have not killed enough), not to mention the millions of civilian casualties that would result from the kind of utter destruction of the infrastructure that he so perversely calls for.

So savage was O’Reilly’s call for acts of terror to be reigned down on Afghan civilians by the US military, one wonders if he received his political education in the caves of Lascaux. We have heard this kind of advice before. It’s underwritten by the same logic that spikes the Taliban’s advice to their own followers. It is the logic of fascism, only this time it is *our fascism* sweetened and made more palatable by the nationalist arrogance and righteous indignation betrayed by O’Reilly and those of his stamp.

It is not as if the flat-footed storm troopers have already arrived. It is more as if shimmerings of

*Unarmed women and children were pursued and killed by US helicopters in Afghanistan. The US media scarcely mentioned the incident*



fascism have crossed our political landscape. Ghostly coruscations of negative energy are slowly crystallising into holograms of Joe McCarthy hovering ominously over the White House. We are living in the moist flaps of Richard Nixon's jowls, drowning in the yellow ink of Steve Dunleavy's pen, sleepwalking on a Pirandello stage, discovering ourselves as Ionesco characters in a Rod Sterling nightmare. Unlike *The Twilight Zone*, the horror of the human condition won't disappear when we turn off our television sets. Bill O'Reilly's kerosene tongue will always be there, wagging obscenely on our television sets, or disguised in the mouths of everyday God-fearing folk.

But the worst offenders in the media are not always the drooling reactionary pundits such as O'Reilly. They are also organisations like National Public Radio. On January 10, FAIR [Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting] put out an Action Alert asking people to write to National Public Radio about the politics of its Middle East reporting. NPR had been referring to the situation in Israel and Palestine around the New Year as a period of "relative calm" or "comparative quiet". NPR went on to clarify this description by noting that "only one Israeli has been killed in those three weeks". What NPR failed to acknowledge was that during this "quiet" period, an average of one Palestinian per day was being killed by Israeli occupation forces. (See <http://www.fair.org/activism/npr-israel-quiet.html>). Despite protests organized by FAIR, this distortion continues to be repeated.

**T**he media is certainly part of the living infrastructure that is helping to promote the current transition of the United States into a garrison state – we have the USA Patriot Act; we have the military tribunals; we have the Office of Homeland Security; we have the necessary scapegoats; we have the Office of Strategic

Influence working hand-in-hand with the US Army's Psychological Operations Command (PSYOPS) operating domestically (actually, it's operating domestically is against the law, but we know that during the Reagan administration that PSYOPS staffed the Office of Public Diplomacy and planted stories in the media supporting the Contras, a move made possible by Otto Reich, now the assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere Affairs and we know that a few years ago PSYOPS interns were discovered working as interns in the news division of CNN's Atlanta headquarters); we have the strongest military in the world; we have the military hawks in control of the Pentagon; we have pummelled an evil nation into pre-history, identified new evil and quasi-evil empires; turned Central Asia into a zone of military containment, and shown that we can kill mercilessly and control the media reporting in the theatre of operations, as major newspapers regularly buried stories of US air strikes on

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civilians, such as in the case of Niazi Kala (sometimes called Qalaye Niaze), where the United Nations reported that 52 civilians were killed by the US attack, including 25 children. According to the UN report, unarmed women and children were pursued and killed by American helicopters, even as they fled to shelter or tried to rescue

survivors.

And we have a leader who is little more than a glorified servant of the military industrial complex. And one who is able to admit this publicly and arouse little opposition. In fact, such an admission wins him the glowing admiration of the American people. The Bush administration's scheduled release of documents under the Presidential Records Act of 1978, which includes Ronald Reagan's papers, have successfully been placed on lockdown. So far Cheney's much publicised legal stonewalling has prevented full disclosure of the extent of Enron-National Energy Policy Development Group



contacts. Government secrecy and the withholding of information available to the public by law has become a guiding axiom of government practice.

**T**he struggle for media reform is an essential part of the struggle for democracy. McChesney and Nichols argue that media reform proposals need to apply existing anti-monopoly laws to the media; restrict ownership of radio stations to one or two per owner; fight the monopolisation of TV-station ownership, break the lock of newspaper chains on entire regions, create reasonable media ownership regulations, establish a full range of low-power, non-commercial radio and television stations across the United States; invest in public broadcasting so as to eliminate commercial pressures and to serve low-income communities; allow tax credits to any non-profit medium; lower mailing costs for non-profit and significantly non-commercial publications; eliminate political candidate advertising as a condition of a broadcast licence; require that stations who run paid political broadcasts by politicians run free ads of similar length from all the other candidates on the ballots immediately afterward; reduce or eliminate TV advertising directed at children under 12; and decommercialise local TV news with regulations that require stations to grant journalists an hour daily of commercial-free news times; and set budget guidelines for those newscasts based on a percentage of the station's revenues.

In his magisterial work, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, Robert McChesney writes that media reform cannot be successful if isolated from other struggles for democracy. He writes:

Media reform will not, cannot, be won in isolation from broader democratic reform. The only way to wrestle some control over media and communication from the giant firms that presently dominate the field will be to mobilise some semblance of a popular movement. As Saul Alinsky noted, the only way to beat organised money is with organised people. And while media reform is a necessary component – even a cornerstone – for any democratic movement, it is

not enough. Although it can attract the enthusiastic support of many people – including many people not formerly politically active – it is insufficient on its own to capture the imagination of enough people to establish a mass movement. But when combined with electoral reform, workers' rights, civil rights, environmental protection, health care, tax reform, and education, it can be part of a movement that can reshape our society, putting power in the hands of the many.

**W**herever and whenever possible, radical educators have been implementing critical media literacy classes in high school and university classrooms. Examining the politics surrounding media policy and practices from a historical materialist perspective (i.e. looking at the media in the context of the creation of a transnational capitalist class), critical media literacy educators employ a critical semiotics to analyse the media as a form of popular culture that carries a lot of unexamined ideological freight; it investigates the form and content of commercial broadcasting; and it examines representations of race, class, gender, and sexual relations as a form of ideological production.

Of course, examining the media critically – especially the Bush administration's war on terrorism – at this particular historical juncture in the United States risks charges of anti-patriotism. Yet, from a critical perspective one could argue that patriotism that is not at the same time conjugated with introspection, sustained critical self-reflexivity, and the possibility of transcending the reified knowledge and social relations of the corporate capitalist state, is a patriotism that does an injustice to the meaning of the word. One of the best features of a democracy lies in its provisions for the ability to be self-critical, to challenge, or affirm, as the case may be, what has been presented by the dominant capitalist media as common sense. That feature has been effectively eroded by increasing corporate control of the media. Democracy cannot exist in a society whose media are owned and run by the transnational capitalist elite. The socialist alternative is the only possibility for democracy to be secured. ■

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## The building of Empire

*Why has the book Empire\* created widespread interest as well as controversy? Many have welcomed a new attempt to critique capitalism and promote discussion about alternatives to capitalism. This is not to suggest that Empire is above criticism, but it should not be dogmatically written off. Empire is more than an apologia for post-modernism, even if it shares post-modern themes. By Phil Sharpe*

**W**hat is Empire? How does this conception differ from the traditional view of capitalism as imperialism? The authors have a vision of capitalism as becoming deterritorialised, and truly universal. Globalisation has replaced the nation state as the central economic and political unit of capital accumulation. Negri and Hardt argue that this process should be critically welcomed. Indeed, the working class has acted to bring it about, and it improves the possibility of transcending capitalism.

This point is elaborated by the authors in historical terms. Capitalism has traditionally, politically, ideologically and philosophically upheld a conception of the nation state as an entity that constrains the power of the multitude (working class and other oppressed strata). Hence capital has the task of transforming the multitude into a people, or a homogenous national entity that will support the expansion of capital as imperialism.

Capital accumulation, as Marx, Hilferding, Lenin and Luxemburg showed, was based upon imperialism and the necessity to obtain an outside realm of sources of raw materials, markets, and labour power. These outside areas became incorporated into the logic of capital. To Lenin, imperialism was a system of contradiction and crisis, and so the only alternative was proletarian revolution. This meant capitalism would not evolve into ultra-imperialism and international economic co-operation.

Lenin's standpoint anticipated that class struggle could not lead to the historical continuation of imperialism, and world revolution was the most likely occurrence. But the actual result, argue the authors, has been Empire that expresses the subjectivity of the multitude in struggle, a struggle which has established a new terrain for world revolution. (p235)

**T**he period after the Second World War was one of transition to Empire. From the point of view of capital, imperialism became increasingly liable to crisis and started to impede the needs of capital accumulation. The domination of USA imperialism after WW2, and the increasing role of the transnational corporations (TNCs) challenged traditional colonial style

imperialism. The hegemony of USA imperialism was based upon a new model of decolonisation, the decentering of production, and a disciplinary system of the new deal/welfare state. (pp240-249)

This situation represented a tendency towards an increasingly integrated world production and world market, and an enhanced subjectivity of the multitude caused by national liberation struggles, peasants becoming workers, and new opportunities for mobility and the development of the working class as an international class. (pp249-254)

As a result, there was an increasing "virtual unity", although not a conscious political unity, against the disciplinary regime of capital, and this culminated in the anti-imperialist victory of Vietnam against USA imperialism. (p262) The only way that capital could ensure its hegemony over labour/multitude was by a massive structural transformation. (p268)

**B**ut Empire is not a total victory for labour, because the power of capital remains and creates new conditions to exploit labour. However, the previous relations of outside/inside have been transformed. Instead of the rigid outside/other of capitalism as

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### **From the point of view of capital, imperialism became liable to crisis**

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imperialism, and the domination of non-capitalist areas, there is now one global and universal world economy. (pp186-190) There is no longer any individual, rigid and centralised power structure, but instead power is diverse and diffuse and present throughout Empire. A fluid unitary power based upon "no-space" has replaced the geographical tensions of inter-imperialist conflict. (p9)

In contrast to Empire, imperialism had serious "ecological limitations", it is suggested. The territorial struggle for geographically defined markets led to acute crisis, slump, and inter-imperialist war, and primarily the problem was that the working class and anti-imperialist struggle was in rebellion against the disciplinary regime. (pp269-272) This meant that the social wage/necessary labour time was increasing and surplus labour time was decreasing, so the rate of profit was falling. Therefore capital had to adapt to the new subjectivity and dynamism of the working class, or its authority would be seriously challenged. (p276)

Capital was also aware that the USSR had collapsed because the bureaucracy had not adapted to the new creativity and subjectivity of the working class. (pp273-279) Primarily change was necessary because capital's logic was in contradiction with its own subjectivity, a situation which had arisen from its own ontological limits as a geographically limited and rigid structure. Thus imperialism represented serious limits on the development of capital, and so if capital was to develop it had to go beyond these limits. (pp332-333)

In the Gulf war the formation of Empire was ideologically expressed by the concept of just war, ethical imperatives, and the role of international organisations like the UN. But primarily what comes to the fore are the requirements of globalisation rather than the resurgence of imperialism, the book argues. (p20)

**T**he objective material basis of Empire is the role of the TNC's. They have not replaced the traditional imperialist role of the old style colonial powers, but instead represent the basis of a new global system that continually redefines the internal and external relations between the different parts of Empire. (pp31-40) The autonomy of the political, such as the power of the independent nation state is challenged by the TNC, but this power is often mediated by new international organisations like the UN and G7, though the TNC remains structurally hegemonic in Empire. (p310)

Primarily we have to consider these structures of global power in terms of the facilitation and reassertion of control of labour/multitude in the interests of capital and its reproduction. (p318) This task requires not a rigid assertion of spatial and geographical power, but instead a modification and displacement of the subjectivity of the multitude/labour in the interests of capital. (pp318-319) There is a potentially important contradiction between the requirement of political passivity and the necessity to allow for the dynamism and creativity of the subjectivity of labour. (pp319-321)

So the domination of capital is deterritorialised, immanent, and in flux, and is not transcendent, external, and rigid. Formerly peripheral areas are transformed into integral parts of a single economic and cultural system in terms of the totalising logic of

capital. In precise economic terms capital is quantitative in its reduction of everything to the cash nexus, and it is immanent and internal in terms of the operation of economic laws such as the extraction of surplus value. (pp326)

The limits of the nation state therefore represented an externality that contradicted the dynamic immanence of the development of capital, and capital has striven to overcome these limits. This is why the external institutions of the disciplinary/civil/nation state have declined and have been replaced by the internal discipline of subjectivity of the subjects, or the society of control, *Empire* argues.

The rigid identities of family, factory, etc., of disciplinary society have increasingly contradicted the logic of capital, and so the more fluid, immanent, diverse, mobile, flexible, hybrid identity of the multitude is a subjectivity that can be utilised by capital. (pp321-332)

However, the basis for opposing Empire is not to nostalgically revive the politics of the nation state. Even in the period of imperialism the Social Democratic and Stalinist adaptation to the nation state was an adaptation to the requirements of capitalism. (pp111-114) Also national liberation became a contradiction in terms, in that it did express progressive opposition to imperialism, but it also resulted in incorporation within the logic of the global world economy of capitalism. (pp132-134) Primarily, anti-imperialist politics of the nation state have become anachronistic because the nation is in structurally irreversible decline and is historically reactionary. (p336)



The US was defeated in Vietnam

**I**t would be an over-generalisation to consider that Negri and Hardt are arguing that Empire is a straightforward victory for the multitude. The new dynamism of the multitude has made imperialism untenable, but as a definitive victory over capital did not occur, the result was Empire. (p43) The result is contradictory. The outcome is that

Empire has universalised and increased the domination of capital and exploitation has intensified. (p43) Nevertheless, to the authors Empire is still an expression of historical progress, just as capitalism was an advance upon pre-capitalist modes of production because the material and subjective basis for human liberation has been advanced. (p43)

# globalisation

So it is anachronistic, nationalist, and localist to advocate traditional strategies that call for the defence of the nation state against globalisation. It is an idealist illusion to defend the "purity" and naturalist view of the local as diversity and difference in contrast to the homogeneity of globalisation. For the local is a specific adaptation in its heterogeneity to the homogenous and global requirements of capital. The real opponent is not globalisation, but rather the global relations of Empire. (p46)

It is odd that Negri and Hardt deny the character of their philosophical standpoint as an expression of a dialectic of struggle between capital and labour. What is more theoretically significant is that their conception does seem to presuppose a given end to history. Nevertheless *Empire* has outlined the objective historical significance of the class struggle in a manner that is more cogent and powerful than many orthodox Marxist analyses. This possibly explains its popularity.

The analysis of Empire is the basis for the authors' conception of strategy. They argue that the traditional working class has changed from the industrial working class to the more general and diffuse characterisation of the multitude. But the multitude is still exploited and dominated by capital. At present struggles often seem to lack international dimensions, and appear as a local, national and anachronistic echo of previous times. But this is a misleading appearance because these new struggles are an expression of the context of Empire, and so all struggles have the potential to be subversive and challenge the power of Empire from any geographical location. (p58)

On this view, the old strategy of opposing capital as imperialism at the weakest link is outmoded. The struggle against Empire has not yet produced concrete models of an effective alternative, which would be comparable to the Paris Commune. (p206) But it is still necessary to learn from existing struggles. One lesson that is already apparent is that although Empire can be resisted locally, this is not as effective as developing an alternative and oppositional global strategy.

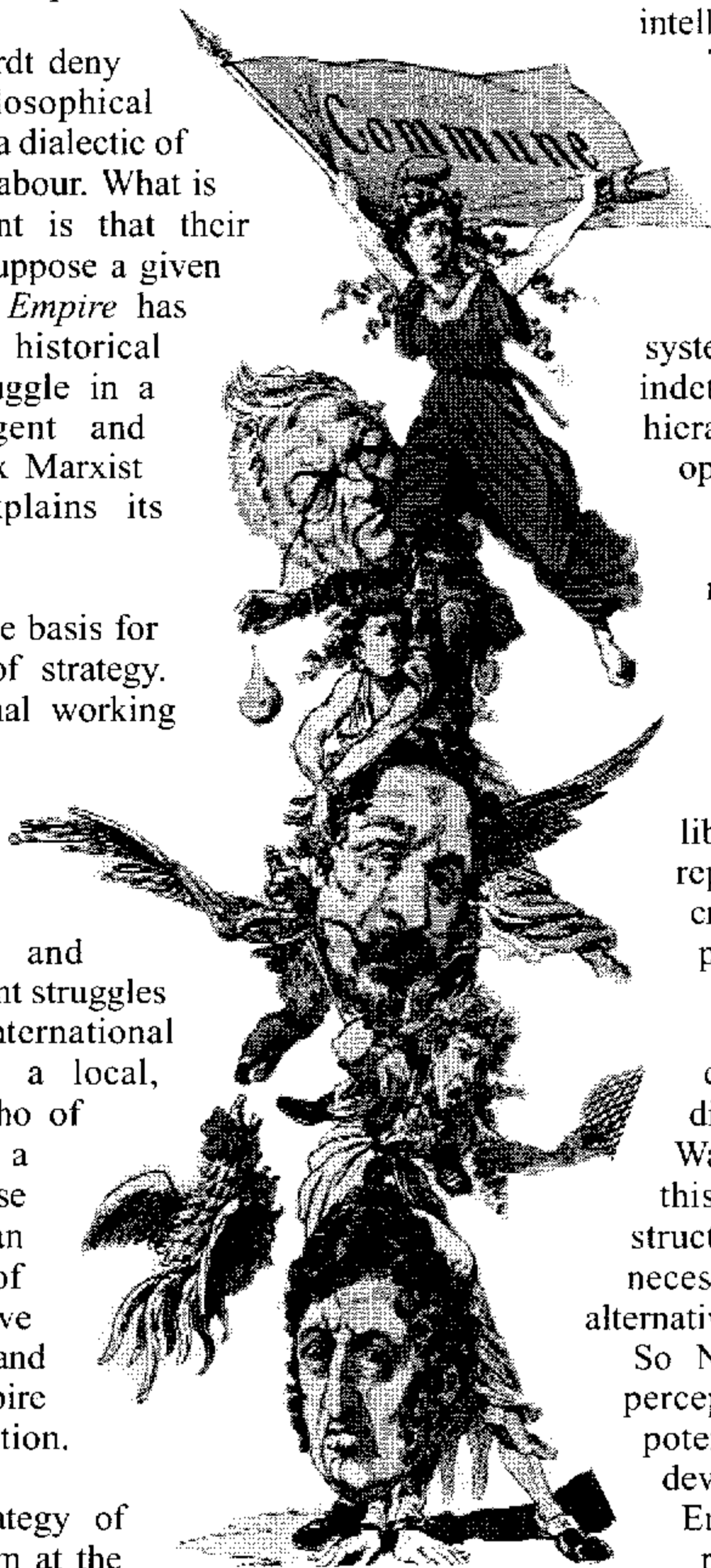
Previous struggles of the working class were about opposing capitalist exploitation from the inside in relation to the antagonism concerning the production of exchange value. The aim was to modify the process of capital accumulation in favour of the working class and realise a non-capitalist outside with the capacity to produce and obtain use-values. But now the relations of exploitation and domination are "total" and lack an exact determination, and labour is without a rigid place and is increasingly mobile, flexible, intellectual and communicative.

The universality and non-place of labour, and the creativity of the multitude, shows the potential for international class struggle, but the strategic problem concerns what is the most effective focus of struggle in a system that is increasingly complex and indeterminate in relation to the hierarchies of exploitation and oppression. With the changing forms of exploitation and domination, we have to redefine what being against means.

In this context *Empire* suggests that mobility is not just a movement of labour, but is rather a nomadism that represents resistance against oppression and the search for liberation. Mobility and nomadism represent the universal productive creativity of the multitude, but the problem of spontaneity means that it is not sufficient in itself to overcome poverty and global exploitation. Exodus and nomadism did lead to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and brought down Stalinism, but this process could not replace the structures of Empire, and it is still necessary to develop a conscious alternative.

So Negri and Hardt seem to have a perceptive understanding of the potentialities and problems of developing a strategy for overcoming Empire. This is a true observation in regards to how they conceive of the material and political problems of developing opposition to Empire. They are not justifying an uncritical adaptation to spontaneity in relation to an understanding of some of the

concrete problems of developing an alternative to Empire, and their reference to the Paris Commune shows they are aware the multitude has not yet constructed or even aspired to the development of oppositional structures that could topple Empire.



A visual history of the different governments of France from 1831 to 1871 with each new leader preceded and followed by a revolution, ending in the Paris Commune

**N**evertheless there is also an apparent indifference to the importance of strategy and tactics in relation to an important problem in their understanding of Empire. This is connected to the idealist view that Empire represents a primary lack, or has no real grounding, because it is parasitic on the dynamism of the multitude. On this view strategy and tactics represent an uncomplicated unity as the realisation of the primacy of the creativity of the multitude.

It is one thing to suggest that the creativity of the multitude is the primary basis of Empire, and to show that the wealth and power of Empire is a displaced expression of this dynamic role of the multitude. But it is another thing to reduce exploitation, wealth and power to an essentially ephemeral expression of the role of the multitude and therefore lacking in their own significance. This idealist standpoint that denies the materiality and importance of alienating power structures becomes aligned to the view that history is moving inevitably in favour of the multitude.

In these almost mystical terms the question of the significance of strategy and tactics becomes an unreflective and mechanical representation of the imperatives of history. The strategic conclusion to be drawn from this is that history is moving in the direction of the omnipotent power of the multitude. From this historical perspective, the importance of developing oppositional strategy and tactics becomes minimised, and instead they become derivative of the inherently favourable processes of history.

**T**he authors maintain that the fluidity and dynamism of the multitude within Empire is beyond quantitative measure. Measure, they say, is shown to be a metaphysical abstraction because the question of what value is will be defined by humanity's creativity and not by the rigidities of capital's logic. (pp353-356) But this logical contradiction cannot be sustained because it represents an absurdity of indecision about whether labour has a quantifiable quality as measure and value, or whether it goes beyond value because of the dynamism of subjectivity.

But this has a theoretical purpose in that it upholds their view that labour is almost autonomous from its relation to capital because of its dynamic and creative subjective capacity. This standpoint creates absurdities because to accept that labour still produces commodities is to accept that labour has an abstract and value-creating character owing to the alienating control of labour power by capital. Negri and Hardt cannot accept such a resolution of their theoretical problems because it would mean an acknowledgement of the real, material and concrete power of capital. It would show that Empire has a substance that is not idealistically reducible to the subjective power of the multitude.

**T**he idealism of Negri and Hardt in their view that the multitude constitutes and redefines time is

tantamount to suggesting that the workers already have control of production when it is obvious that production still retains its abstract, value, measurable, and alienating quality. This naive strategic conclusion is not surprising in that it relates to the view that Empire is unreal and nothing more than the negative parasitic effect of the power of the multitude. Hence what is primarily problematic is not their formal rejection of the law of value, but rather that this rejection is based upon an untenable and idealist standpoint that effectively denies the material actuality and importance of the alienating power of capital over labour. They say:

When imperial government intervenes, it selects the liberatory impulses of the multitude in order to destroy them, and in return is driven forward by resistance. ....the effectiveness of Empire's regulatory and repressive procedures must finally be traced back to the virtual, constitutive action of the multitude. Empire itself is not a positive reality..... Imperial power is the negative residue, the fallback of the operation of the multitude; it is a parasite that draws its vitality from the multitude's capacity to create ever new sources of energy and value. A parasite that saps the strength of its host, however, can endanger its own existence. (p361)

This standpoint is formally politically radical, but is essentially a justification of a schema that glosses over and denies the importance of the state power of capital. To theoretically deny the actuality of the economic and political power of capital may seem reassuring, but it is actually an absurdity to maintain that only the repressed subjectivity of the multitude keeps Empire in control. If this were true then why haven't the multitude been able to act sooner to overthrow Empire?

In other words, Negri and Hardt seem to suggest that the only real strategic problem is the self-repression, lack of confidence and initiative within the multitude, and if this problem is resolved then the question of political power is a historical certainty. But this idealist strategic conception skates over the actuality – not ephemeral shadow of the multitude – of the alienating power and importance of the bourgeois state and ideology. For if Empire really was nothing more than the displaced subjectivity of the multitude then it would surely be strategically less difficult and inexorable that revolutionary change would occur, and smoothly overcome the resistance of the bourgeois state.

Consequently the subjective rejection of the importance of Marx's theory of value, together with a denial of the alienating economic and political qualities of Empire, is connected to a conception that advocates a rigid identity between the real, actual, and possible. This means that history is conceived as the realisation of an inherent end.

**I**t is admirable that Negri and Hardt want to emphatically reject the bourgeois ideological

# globalisation

reduction of the possible to the real and actual, and instead locate the real as expressing the possibility of an alternative to Empire. It is also admirable that they want to show that migrants and refugees constitute not an object of liberal sympathy but rather express revolutionary possibilities. But what is problematic about these sentiments is that they are connected to an idealist view that denies the open-ended character of history and instead can only consider one possible outcome: the triumph of the multitude.

So the hollow optimism of the bourgeoisie is being opposed with another type of shallow optimism that ideologically contrasts one predetermined outcome to history with a predetermined alternative. Consequently, the materialist aspects of Negri and Hardt's historical construction of Empire come into contradiction with their idealist accommodation to a predetermined philosophy of history.

Consequently, this becomes the basis for justifying a spontaneous conception of revolutionary struggle without the necessity of developing a conscious political organisation and strategy, and so strategy is primarily a question of realising spontaneous possibilities. For example, the mobility and hybridity of the multitude is connected to the demand for global citizenship. There is no tactical problem with this demand, but the theoretical and practical problem concerns the emphasis upon spontaneity which suggests that the internationalisation and mobility of the working class has an inexorable logic towards overcoming Empire.

The unity of the logical and historical is represented as a unity of the social, economic and political, and so there is no problem of mediation and relation. Instead, this uncomplicated unity is represented by the demand for reappropriation of the economy by the producers: "Just because these productive machines have been integrated into the multitude does not mean that the multitude has control over them. Rather, it makes more vicious and injurious their alienation. The right to reappropriation is really the multitude's right to self-control and autonomous self-production." (p407) Negri and Hardt are actually rigidly equating the real with the actual, in that the being of the multitude seems to inherently suppose a different historical future:

The new range of possibilities in no way guarantees what is to come. And yet, despite such reservations, there is something real that

foreshadows the coming future: the telos that we can feel pulsing, the multitude that we construct within desire. (p406)

Indeed the multitude has already essentially constructed a new mode of production within the shell of capitalism:

The mode of production of the multitude is posed against exploitation in the name of labour, against property in the name of co-operation, and against corruption in the name of freedom. It self-valorises bodies in labour, reappropriates productive intelligence through co-operation and transforms existence in freedom. The history of class composition and the history of labour militancy demonstrate the matrix of these ever new and yet determinate reconfigurations of self-valorisation, co-operation, and political self-organisation as an effective social project. (pp408-409)

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## ...there is a rigid identity between the real, actual and possible

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Thus in a certain sense the dynamism and subjectivity of the multitude means that we are already in a state of freedom and well-being in terms of the capacity of the multitude to transcend the rigid and alienating limits of value, measure,

and the requirements of capital. It is one thing to show the historical possibilities for the emergence of alternatives within capitalism, such as the subjective energy and capacity of the multitude. But it is another thing to suggest that these possibilities are effectively being realised within the limits of the domination of capital.



Nike sweatshop

Negri and Hardt are emphatic about the ability of labour to overcome the problem of alienation within capitalism, and so it seems that the producers can establish non-alienating and non-exploitative conditions without the necessity for revolutionary change. They seem to be suggesting that change can be accomplished without class struggle, because what is revolutionary is being accomplished by the

subjectivity of the multitude within capitalism.

Thus demands like control by the producers, global citizenship, and a social wage, could be conceived as reformist demands that do not require revolutionary struggle for their realisation. This is the strategic ambiguity of these demands, and it is an ambiguity that represents the idealist flaws of *Empire*. ■

\*Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt: *EMPIRE*  
Harvard University Press: 2000, £13.99

## Human rights and the struggle for social justice

This is an edited version of the Inaugural Professorial Lecture by **Bill Bowring**, who is Professor in Human Rights and International Law at the University of North London

**H**uman rights and social justice are two phrases which have never before been so much in constant use, especially at the level of government. At times, they seem to be empty, of rhetorical significance only. Take human rights first.

There is no dispute that the present dominant discourse of human rights has its roots in Western traditions of natural law. But before the 18<sup>th</sup> century no-one used the concept and it would have had no meaning. The first statements of natural rights, the “first generation” of civil and political rights, are to be found in the revolutionary documents of the French and American Revolutions.

What has characterised talk of natural or human rights then and to this day is their inherently problematic nature. In Jeremy Waldron’s *Nonsense Upon Stilts*<sup>1</sup> the validity and indeed coherence of human rights are challenged from the right – Edmund Burke, the Irish father of English conservatism – from the centre, Jeremy Bentham, the founder of utilitarianism and of much liberal thought, – and from the left – Karl Marx himself, attacking the egotism and atomism of natural rights.

In the contemporary world, these challenges are found in three main areas. First, the debates as to universalism and cultural relativism – are human rights really the property of all human beings everywhere and at all times, or are they historically determined and culturally specific? Second, the odious notion of the “clash of civilisations”, between two cultures that share the same roots, and the ideas of cross-cultural approaches to human rights. Third, the recent suggestion that the so-called “third-generation”

“rights of peoples” – the rights to self-determination, to development, to a clean environment, to peace – were an effusion of seventies radicalism and have had their day.

We have a more fundamental problem. There is scarcely a government now that does not proclaim its devotion to human rights, at the same time as many of them fragrantly violate them. Costas Douzinas, in his aptly-named *The End of Human Rights*<sup>2</sup> points out that human rights are the “new ideal that has triumphed on the world stage”, yet “if the twentieth century is the epoch of human rights, their triumph is, to say the least, something of a paradox. Our age has witnessed more violations of their principles than any of the previous and less ‘enlightened’ epochs.”<sup>3</sup>

He warns: “As human rights start veering away from their initial revolutionary and dissident purposes, as their end becomes obscured in ever more declarations, treaties and diplomatic lunches, we may be entering the epoch of the end of human rights...”<sup>4</sup>

The concept of social justice, too, has deep roots. Most notably, these are to be found in the teachings of the Catholic Church. Many of the websites which a search on the words “social justice” throws up are church sites. This subversive aspect of Catholic teaching finds its expression in liberation theology and a focus on workers’ rights – the Catholic trade unions of the European continent. Social justice plays a central role in Islam also.

There is a strong tradition within liberal thought according to which social justice is a dangerous threat to freedom. This was perhaps epitomised by Friedrich Hayek. Volume II of his *Law, Legislation and Liberty* was entitled *The Mirage of Social Justice*.<sup>5</sup> For him, social justice described “the aspirations which were at the heart of socialism”; indeed “the prevailing belief in ‘social justice’ was at present probably the gravest threat to most other values of a free civilisation” and “so long as the belief in ‘social justice’ governs political action, this process must progressively approach nearer and nearer to a totalitarian system”.<sup>6</sup>

**H**e added that “the phrase embodies a quasi-religious belief, almost the new religion of our time, but has no content at all, serves merely to insinuate that we ought to consent to a demand of some particular group”. Taken with one other factor, this perception – or prejudice – is at the heart of British problems with social justice, indeed with the notion of social and economic rights.

The other factor is the legacy of the Cold War. It should not be forgotten that the Council of Europe was founded in 1949 as the ideological counterpart of NATO. Its purpose was to demonstrate in the clearest way that the Western side of the Iron Curtain was really serious about the Council’s “three pillars”. These are pluralistic democracy, the rule of law (defined as the absence of arbitrary rule), and the protection of human rights. Thus, the promulgation of

# human rights

the European Convention on Human Rights in 1950 was truly revolutionary, in a way which made the United Kingdom deeply uneasy.

For the first time in history, an international court was created with the power to interfere in the internal affairs of member states, and to render obligatory, binding judgments. But note that the rights protected were, with the exception perhaps of rights not to be deprived of education, and a circumscribed right to private property, the “first generation” civil and political rights of the French and American revolutions. As time has gone by, the Convention has looked increasingly long in the tooth.

If the role of Council of Europe was to demonstrate that the West’s rights were serious and capable of being enforced by individuals against their governments, the Soviet Union and its allies had their own ideological counterpart. It is often forgotten that the former Soviet Constitutions were endowed with fully-articulated human rights chapters. The difference was that these chapters started with social and economic rights. The Soviets did not invent social and economic rights. As binding legal documents these made their first appearance in the West in 1919, in response to the Russian Revolution, in the International Labour Organisation, now an organ of the United Nations.

**B**ut the USSR and its allies put them into practice. Thus, in the Soviet Constitutions, we find the right to work, the right to social security and protection, the rights to health care and free education, the right to leisure and to culture. And, indeed, the Soviet state delivered to a greater or lesser extent. Of course, you were probably in a job you did not want, and it was a crime not to work, and your living accommodation was likely to be shared. But health care, education, and cultural provision were second to none, while freedoms of expression and association, a respect for private life and belief and conscience, did not exist.

This polar opposition, which lasted from 1949 until 1989, is (along with Hayek’s influence) one of the root

causes of UK suspicion of social and economic rights. It is notable that the Human Rights Act 1998 does not protect the full range of rights contained in the United Nations 1948 *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*. Since the Soviets participated in its drafting, it is no surprise that it does enshrine both civil and political and social, economic and cultural rights.

In her important book *Values for a godless age. The story of the United Kingdom’s new bill of rights*<sup>7</sup>, Francesca Klug describes the omission of social and economic rights, save education and property rights, from the Human Rights Act, as an aspect of its out-datedness.<sup>8</sup> She is

unhappy with the notion of “generations of rights”, and

locates what she calls the “second wave” of rights not in 1919 and the aftershock of the Russian Revolution, but in the post World War II reckoning. In this way, she misses the political content of the very real dichotomy between civil and political rights on the one hand, and social and economic rights on the other.

But she does acknowledge that “the inclusion of social and economic rights is crucial if the relevance of the human rights approach to current political debate is to become clear”.<sup>9</sup> Her

argument is that the “combined values that have driven human rights thinking since the Second World War – liberty, justice, dignity, equality, community and now mutuality – inevitably lead to a concern with social and economic rights, whatever means of enforcement is adopted”. This leads “straight back to the terrain of those seeking a new progressive politics, distinct from the Left and Right of old”.<sup>10</sup>

**T**he problem is that not only does this not explain the omission of social and economic rights from the Human Rights Act, it does not give any reason for three recent phenomena. These are first, Britain’s adamant refusal to accede, at Maastricht, to the European Union’s Social Charter, with an emphasis to this day on private provision and labour deregulation. Second, the prolonged rearguard action which the UK fought to exclude solidarity – mainly labour – rights from the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights, and its



Wedgwood plate commemorating the French Revolution, 1789



insistence that these rights should never become justiciable.<sup>11</sup>

Third is Britain's deep reluctance to ratify the Council of Europe's Revised Social Charter of 1996, which we signed in 1997. This is the revised, updated version of the Council's 1961 Social Charter, intended as the social and economic counterpart to the European Convention on Human Rights, but never until now giving a right of redress to a judicial organ. The new Revised Social Charter not only protects a wide range of rights to and at work, to housing, to social security, etc, but for the first time gives a right of collective complaint, by trade unions and non-governmental organisations, to the European Committee for Social Rights.

It is clear that for the United Kingdom – as for the United States, which has to date not even ratified the United Nations' Covenant on Civil, Political and Cultural Rights of 1966 – human rights which may be enforced by the courts, do not extend to social and economic rights, which alone can underpin social justice.

But it is readily apparent that social justice will never be exclusively a matter of individual rights. Groups, collectivities, minorities will always be the largest part of its subject-matter. Michael Ignatieff notes, taking the Kurds as an example, that “for too long human rights has been seen as a form of apolitical humanitarian rescue for oppressed individuals”.<sup>12</sup> But he sticks resolutely to individualism. In his way of thinking “human rights is only a systematic agenda of ‘negative liberty’, a tool kit against oppression, a tool kit that individual agents must be free to use as they see fit within the broader frame of cultural and religious beliefs that they live by”.

The European approach to human rights was not simply a Cold War artefact. That is one reason why the UK was, despite its distinctive common law heritage, able by stages, reluctantly, to embrace the European Convention. And, as the government is from time to time obliged to realise, the institutions of the welfare state, and a certain collectivism are deeply rooted in the UK. As Professor David Feldman, legal adviser to the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, has noted, “... the Convention's approach is far more closely in tune with the essentially collectivist cultural heritage which forms part of the bedrock on which the constitution of the United Kingdom developed and

must build...”<sup>13</sup>

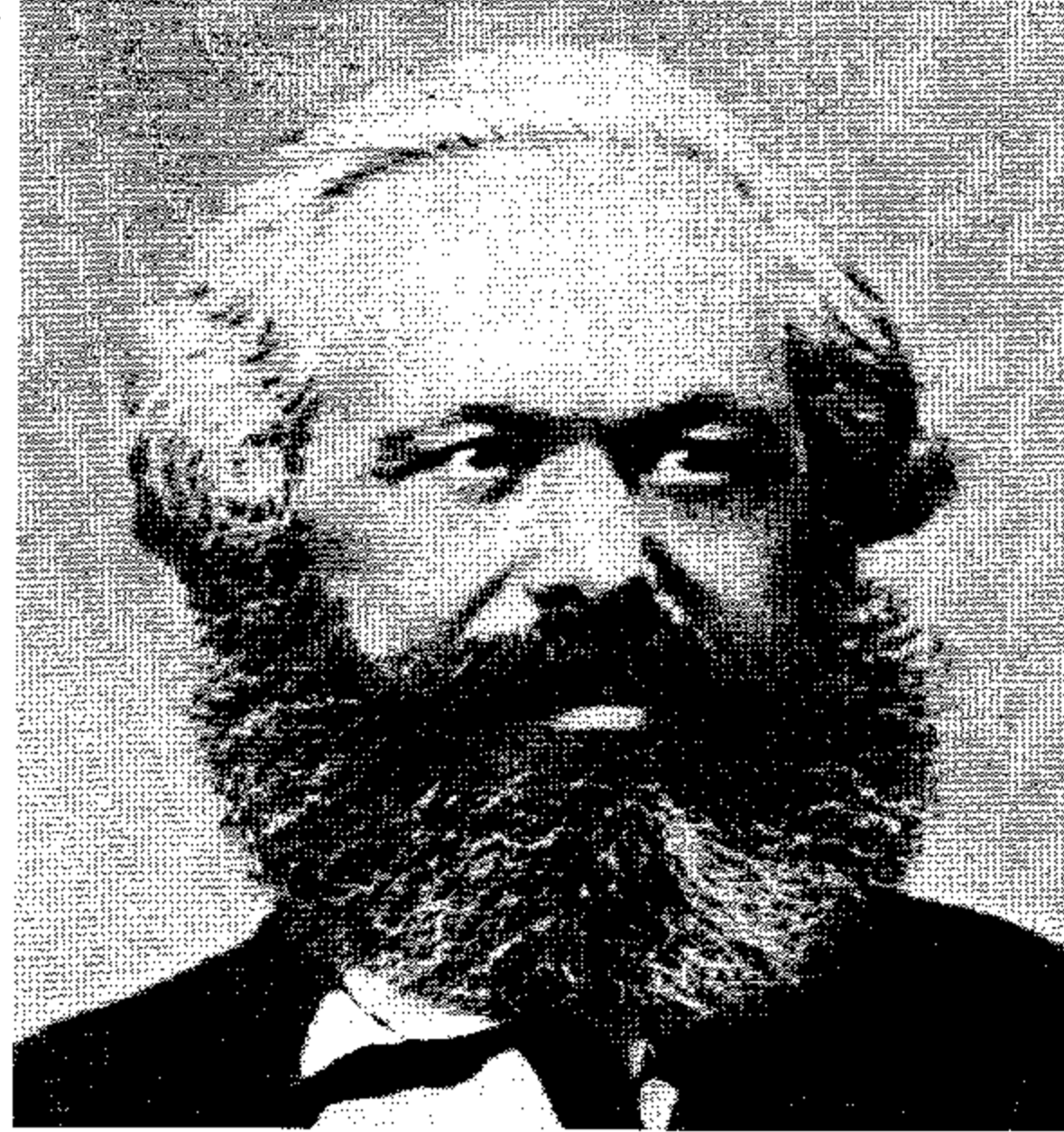
What this means is that protection of many of the first generation, civil and political rights protected by the Convention, is coupled with and balanced by the right of the government to interfere, providing this interference is carried out for a legitimate purpose in the interests of society, according to law, and is proportionate to its aim. This does not apply to the rights to life and to freedom from torture. But it most certainly applies to rights to personal liberty and fair trial, to respect for family and private life, and to freedoms of conscience, expression, and association.

Nowhere is this brought out more clearly than in the case of *James v United Kingdom* (decision of 21 February 1986), one of the strangest cases the European Court of Human Rights has considered. James was none other than the Duke of

Westminster's surveyor, with the Duke himself as second applicant. The Duke complained that his Convention right to private property had been violated by the then Labour government's Leasehold Reform Act 1967, enabling his Belgravia tenants to purchase their homes.

The relevant provision of the Convention asserts that no-one shall be deprived of his possessions “except in the public interest”. The Court was obliged to decide the meaning of the words “public interest” in the case of the Duke and the Labour government. In doing so it used the phrase “social justice” no less than four times. Here are the most significant passages.

Neither can it be read into the English expression ‘in the public interest’ that the transferred property should be put into use for the general public or that the community generally, or even a substantial proportion of it, should directly benefit from the taking. The taking of property in pursuance of a policy calculated to enhance social justice within the community can properly be described as being ‘in the public interest’. In particular, the fairness of a system of law governing the contractual or property rights of private parties is a matter of public concern and therefore legislative measures intended to bring about such fairness are capable of being ‘in the public interest’, even if they involve the compulsory transfer of property from one individual to another.



Marx attacked the atomism of natural rights

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**A new Social Charter  
...gives right of  
collective complaint by  
trade unions and NGOs**

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# human rights

The same applied to compensation, which could be less than the full market value. The significance of this decision, and the language used by the courts, is that human rights as now entrenched by legislation are not so much constrained and balanced by individual responsibility, as the communitarians in the Cabinet insist, at any rate where the responsibility is that of single parents and welfare recipients. On the contrary, the true responsibility is that of individuals and corporations which wield true economic power, and whose rights to unfettered enjoyment of their property have been significantly enhanced.

**S**ocial justice concerns inform not only social policy, but other substantive disciplines. Here is a selection of very recent journal articles. Take, for example, health policy: Fabienne Peter, explores health equity “on the premise that social inequalities in health are wrong not simply because actual health outcomes deviate from some pattern of health outcomes that is considered ideal, but rather because, and insofar as, they are the expression and product of unjust economic, social and political institutions. It thus embeds the pursuit of health equity in the pursuit of social justice in general”.<sup>14</sup>

In the field of urban and regional research, Michael Harloe, reflects on the fact that the concern with competitiveness which is central to New Labour breaks away from social democratic ideology, “with an attack on ‘welfare dependency’ as well as a strong emphasis on individual and community self-reliance and on a conservative conception of community and core values”.<sup>15</sup> Closer to my own discipline, Jonathan Stein argues that the new Community Legal Service, designed to improve access to justice, needs a social justice mission.<sup>16</sup> He argues that the CLS has, by seeking cost efficiency in individual legal aid cases, missed the opportunity to promote social justice.

It will be seen that the content of all of this critical research is not simply the exploration of an academic

discipline. It concerns the real lives of women and men. In particular, it touches on the centre of government policy, here and abroad. Marcel Wissenburg of the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands has put his finger on the nature of the problem.<sup>17</sup> He argues that New Labour’s “third way” practice contradicts both ideas about redistributive justice, and social justice in a wider sense. He observes:

Rather than obliterating the worst of socialism and replacing it with the best of liberalism, it seems that as far as social justice is concerned, the ‘third way’ has replaced the best part of socialism, distributive justice, by the worst part of liberalism, the survival of the fittest.<sup>18</sup>

The questions of social justice always and inevitably concern the lives and hopes of groups, collectivities of people. That is why individualist liberalism is so hostile to the concept.

If the concept of social justice acquires a content through the injustices suffered by people, individually and in groups, human rights come to life through struggle. The black American legal scholar Patricia Williams has described how the language of human rights, which for the most part is the discourse of the powerful and privileged, is transformed into a material force, capable of bringing about social change, through the “alchemy” of their capture by the poor and dispossessed.<sup>19</sup>

It is interesting to note how social justice has acquired a new partner, globalisation, in the discourse of government. Gordon Brown, following in the footsteps of John Smith, is the most fervent advocate of social justice, to judge by his public pronouncements. He has elaborated on this theme

not only in speeches to Oxfam (the Gilbert Murray lecture on 11 January 2000)<sup>20</sup>, and the Child Poverty Action Group on 15 May 2000<sup>21</sup>, but more recently in his 16 November 2001 speech to the Federal Reserve Bank in New York<sup>22</sup>. He mentioned social justice no less than four times in the speech. His theme was



*The first rights documents appeared in the West in the aftermath of the Russian revolution*

brehtaking – that the alliance forged against terrorism since September 11<sup>th</sup> “confirms a profound and pervasive truth... that this generation has it in its power – if it so chooses – to abolish all forms of human poverty”. Thus, according to Brown, “well-managed, globalisation... is the road to rising prosperity and social justice”. His answer to anti-globalisation campaigners was “we shall not retreat from globalisation. Instead, we will advance social justice on a global scale...”

The Department for International Development has most publicly espoused globalisation. Its policy has shown an interesting development. The First White Paper of November 1997, *Eliminating World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*,<sup>23</sup> was followed by a research report of April 1999, entitled *Global Social Policy Principles: Human Rights and Social Justice*<sup>24</sup>. This argued for the development of a global social policy on the basis of the human rights agreements and minimum standards. Its author, Clare Ferguson, stated that “one of the biggest challenges to the achievement of social justice, in the context of globalisation, is finding ways to ensure that these organisations – transnational corporations and non-state providers of public services as well as governments – accept their responsibilities to respect minimum standards in all their activities”.

But the December 2000 White Paper had a new message. Its title once more starts *Eliminating World Poverty*, but this time no challenge. Instead, *Making Globalisation Work for the Poor*.<sup>25</sup> In her speech to the TUC Congress on 16 September 1999, Clare Short spoke of the trade union movement and Labour Party’s “struggle for social justice”.

The new challenge was to “manage the globalisation process equitably and sustainably”. Yet in her speech

to the United Nations on 1 February 2001, Short made no mention of social justice (mentioned once in the second White Paper), or of human rights (frequent references). Instead, she spoke of the “struggle to ensure that the benefits of globalisation reach the poor... to ensure that the wealth and abundance being generated by globalisation brings real benefit to the poor of the world”.

**H**ow are human rights and social justice to be brought together? One answer is to seek to bring about change at the constitutional level. This is what Professor Keith Ewing does, in relation to the Canadian experience, but with direct relevance to the UK. He says: “It may well be true that the struggle for social justice is much larger than constitutional rights” and that “it is waged through political parties and movements, demonstrations, protests, boycotts, strikes, civil disobedience, grassroots activism, political commentary and art”.

“But if so, political action must be undertaken for a purpose, and that purpose presumably is to effect political change, which one way or another will be reflected in law if it is to be sustained. That being so, the highest form of expression which Western legal systems typically acknowledge is constitutional law, and it is there that we should aim to entrench social gains made in the political process, without denying that ‘rights discourse’ is a ‘blunt tool’ for ‘redressing social injustice’.”<sup>26</sup>

A good start for the United Kingdom would be ratification of the Revised European Social Charter, and its entrenchment in domestic legislation in the same way that the Human Rights Act entrenches the European Convention on Human Rights. ■

- 1 Jeremy Waldron *Nonsense Upon Stilts. Bentham, Burke and Marx on the Rights of Man* (Methuen, 1987)
- 2 Costas Douzinas *The End of Human Rights* (Hart Publishing, Oxford, 2000)
- 3 Douzinas, p.2
- 4 Douzinas, p.380
- 5 Friedrich Hayek *The Mirage of Social Justice* (University of Chicago Press, 1976)
- 6 Hayek, p.65, 66-67
- 7 Francesca Klug book *Values for a godless age. The story of the United Kingdom's new bill of rights* (Penguin, 2000)
- 8 Klug, p.165
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- 11 See *The European Charter of Fundamental Rights* (Federal Trust, 1999)
- 12 Michael Ignatieff *Human Rights as Politics and Ideology* (Princeton University Press, 2001), p.26
- 13 David Feldman “The Human Rights Act 1998 and Constitutional Principles” (1999) Vol 19 No 2 *Legal Studies* pp. 165-206, p.178
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- 15 Michael Harloe “Social Justice and the City: The New ‘Liberal Formulation’” (2001) 25.4 *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* pp. 889-897, 890
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- 19 Patricia Williams *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Harvard University Press, 1991)
- 20 [www.treasury.gov.uk/newsroom\\_and\\_speeches/press/2000/press\\_05\\_00.cfm](http://www.treasury.gov.uk/newsroom_and_speeches/press/2000/press_05_00.cfm)
- 21 [www.treasury.gov.uk/newsroom\\_and\\_speeches/press/2000/press\\_62\\_00.cfm](http://www.treasury.gov.uk/newsroom_and_speeches/press/2000/press_62_00.cfm)
- 22 [www.treasury.gov.uk/newsroom\\_and\\_speeches/press/2001/press\\_126\\_01.cfm](http://www.treasury.gov.uk/newsroom_and_speeches/press/2001/press_126_01.cfm)
- 23 cm 3789
- 24 Clare Ferguson “Global Social Policy Principles: Human Rights and Social Justice”, DFID, April 1999, [http://62.189.42.51/DFIDstage/Pubs/files/sdd\\_gsp.pdf](http://62.189.42.51/DFIDstage/Pubs/files/sdd_gsp.pdf)
- 25 cm 5006
- 26 Keith Ewing “Just Words and Social Justice”(1999) 15 *Review of Constitutional Studies*

# Change: the only constant

**Robert Silver** shows that appeals to non-science are not needed to understand the evolution of the cosmos, from the moment of the Big Bang, to the emergence of life and mind

**A**ccording to the scientist Richard Dawkins “the universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference”<sup>1</sup>;

and

“Certainly I see the scientific view of the world as incompatible with religion, but that is not what is interesting about it. It is also incompatible with magic, but that also is not worth stressing. What is interesting about the scientific world view is that it is true, inspiring, remarkable and that it unites a whole lot of phenomena under a single heading”;

and

“Most people, I believe, think that you need a God to explain the existence of the world, and especially the existence of life. They are wrong, but our education system is such that many people don’t know it.”<sup>2</sup>

Dawkins’ belief was confirmed by a 2001 Gallup poll. It showed that 45% of Americans believe that “God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so”; 37% prefer a blended belief that “human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God guided this process”, and a paltry 12% accept the standard scientific theory that “human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God had no part in this process”.<sup>3</sup>

These findings are less surprising when taking into account additional results which show that just 34% considered themselves to be “very informed” about evolution.

In the USA, where the Constitution bans public schools from promoting religion of any kind, the intellectual movement for divine intervention takes many forms. The most recent, and most insidious is known as “intelligent design”, which has superseded “creation science” in seeking to oppose the notion of evolution as a natural process. It is no accident that organisations such as the Discovery Institute<sup>4</sup> heavily promote intelligent design alongside equally strident promotion of the ideals which give legitimacy to the capitalist system of production.

In a major blow to all mystics, pseudo-scientists, post-modern deconstructionists, and proponents of intelligent design, accumulating advances from all

branches of science have been brought together in *Cosmic Evolution*.<sup>\*</sup> In his new book, Eric Chaisson shows that appeals to non-science are not needed to understand the evolution of the cosmos: from the moment of the Big Bang, to the emergence of life and mind – through which matter thinks about itself.

By bringing together the results of the fragmented disciplines of the specialised sciences, and integrating them into an interdisciplinary worldview, it has become possible to trace a chain of knowledge.

This links the evolution of primal energy into elementary particles; the evolution of those particles into atoms; in turn those atoms into galaxies and stars; the evolution of stars into heavy elements; the evolution of those elements into the molecular building blocks of life; of those molecules into life itself; of advanced life forms into intelligence; and of intelligent life into the cultured and technological civilisation that we now share.

**S**even major construction phases in the history of the universe have been identified and studied by the compartments of modern science in the few hundred years since the Renaissance, and these are represented in Figure 1, along with a number of key events. The “arrow of time” is used as an intellectual guide to the sequence of events that have changed systems from simplicity to complexity, from inorganic to organic, and

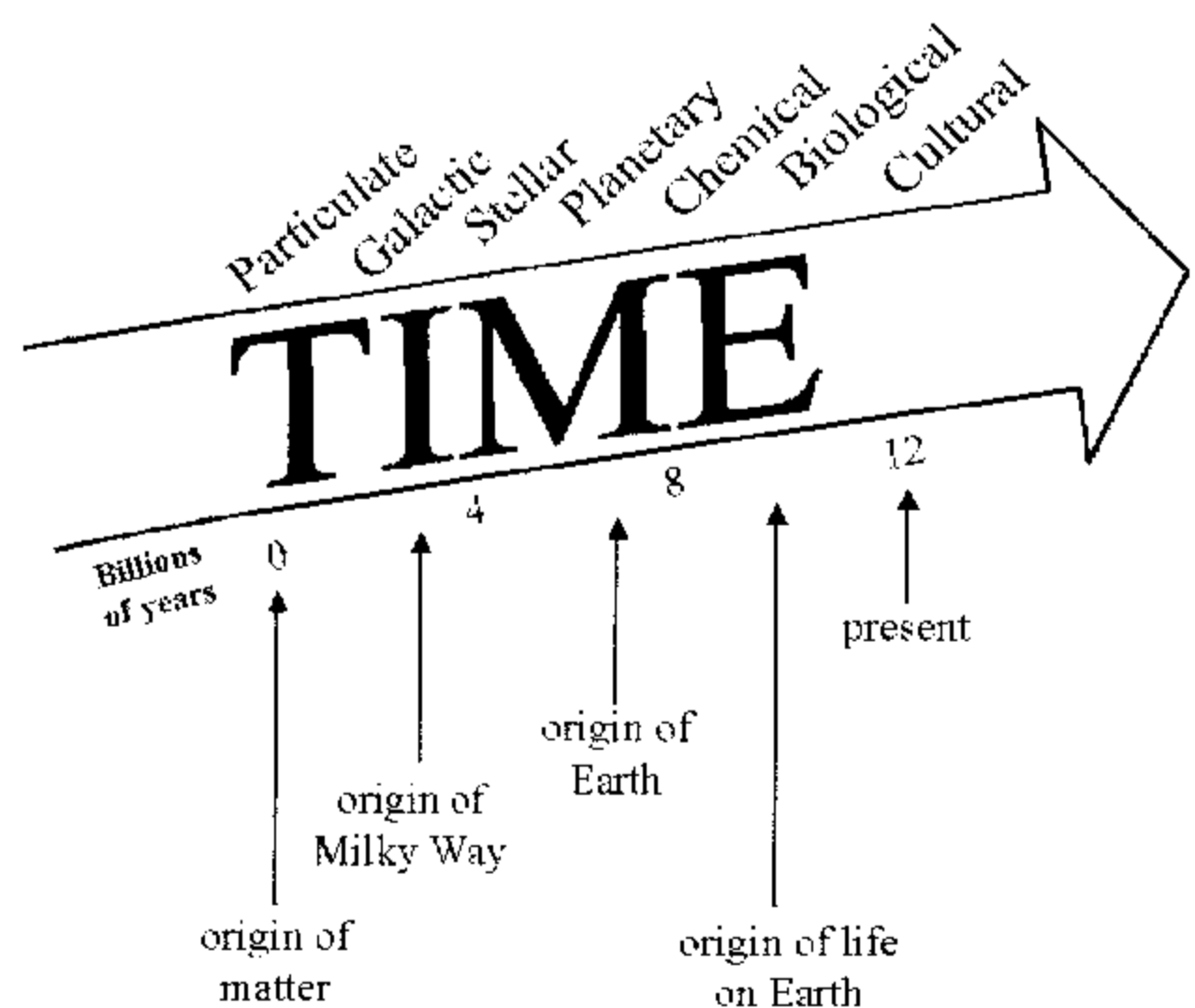


Figure 1: major construction phases in the history of the universe

from chaos to order.

Chaisson sets out to provide a single unifying explanation for the growth of order, form and structure among all materiality, showing how the laws of physics – the preservation of energy, and the tendency to disorder – operate in all phases of this continuous process of development.

It is the flow of energy, he argues, that produces spontaneous infinite variety, but the survival, or success of these chance effects is limited, sieved, constrained, determined by the circumstances in which they emerge. Through a range of examples from the seeding of galaxies from gaseous clouds, to the formation of proteins from the surprisingly small number of chemical elements, and, naturally, in biological evolution, Chaisson shows how random changes interact with the “natural agents of order” to produce change.

<i>Generic Structure</i>	<i>Approximate Age (<math>10^9</math> years)</i>	<i>Average free energy rate density</i>
galaxies	12	0.5
stars	10	2
planets	5	75
plants	3	900
animals	$10^{-2}$	20,000
brains	$10^{-3}$	150,000
society	0	500,000

This simple table shows how the estimated rate of flow of energy through a gram of matter (average free energy rate density) can be used as a measure of increasing complexity over time.

Although the book is written predominantly for those with a scientific background, its organisation allows much to be learned by everyone, including those who are ill-equipped in mathematics.

In common with many natural scientists the author defines matter as “the stuff which is common to all material things” as things which occupy space and have mass. So solids, liquids and gases are matter, but ideas, space, and photons are not.

Chaisson identifies three eras in the history of the universe. The second – Matter Era, lasting many billions of years, superseded the Radiation Era – of only 100,000 years or so after the Big Bang. When cosmic conditions arising from thermal expansion emerged to foster the emergence of order and organization, matter began to form from the massless photons which radiated – and still radiate – “pure energy” throughout the universe. The universe is now experiencing the tentative beginnings of the Life Era, which is by no means certain to develop fully:

..After more than ten billion years of cosmic evolution, the dominant species on planet Earth – the human being – has learned to tinker not only with matter and energy but also with evolution. Whereas previously the gene (strands of DNA) and the environment (whether physical, biological, or cultural) governed evolution, twenty-first-century Earthlings are rather suddenly gaining control of aspects of both of these agents of change. We are now tampering with matter, diminishing the resources of our planet while constructing the trappings of utility and comfort. And now we stand on the verge of manipulating life itself, potentially altering the genetic makeup of human beings. The physicist unleashes the forces of Nature; the biologist experiments with the structure of genes; the psychologist influences behaviour with drugs. We are, quite literally, forcing a change in the way things change.

**A** connection between the almost simultaneous publication of this book, in 2001, and the biggest-ever corporate bankruptcy may seem to be accidental, purely coincidental. But Chaisson’s search for a single, fundamental phenomenon underlying the development of order, form and complexity led him to home in on the flow of energy in an expanding universe. And Enron, the product of and prime mover in capitalist globalisation, was the largest trader in energy flows on the planet. It was, of necessity, not just bound up in the economic system. Its tentacles reached into the heart of politics, funding, it is alleged, some 75% of Bush’s Senators, and making big contributions to New Labour. The use of energy and control of natural resources is, and will be a vital determinant of the evolution of modern society.

Chaisson includes social systems within his analysis as the cultural-evolutionary phase of evolution, from hunter-gathering through industrialisation to the present day. He shows how the make-up and functioning of whole cities, states, and nations, like every other complex system, manifest the laws of non-equilibrium thermodynamics. All organised entities exist “on the edge”, “from unstable giant stars to struggling life-forms to endangered ecosystems.

It is their dynamic steady-states that act as sources of innovativeness, creativity, and the very way that systems take advantage of chances to advance steadfastly along the scale of complexity. That mixture, once more, of randomness and determinism is also why realistic economies will never be predictable in detail, but will remain process-dependent, dynamic, and always evolving. By contrast, with regard to nation-states and the financiers who seek to control them, economic equilibrium would signify a meltdown, indeed a “heat death” of modern society – the unequivocal collapse of global markets.

Chaisson’s synthetic, holistic approach enables us to



*Andromeda, a spiral galaxy 2.2 million light years away from Earth*

imagine the emergence of a new form of social organisation:

Nature's many ordered systems can now be regarded as intricately complex structures evolving through a series of instabilities. In the neighbourhood of a stable (equilibrium) regime, evolution is sluggish or nonexistent because small fluctuations are continually damped; *destruction* of structure is the typical behavior wherein disorder rules. By contrast, near a transition (energy) threshold, evolution accelerates and the final state depends on the probability of creating a fluctuation of a given type. Once this probability becomes appreciable, the system eventually reaches a unique though dynamic steady state, in which *construction* of

structure wherein order rules is distinctly possible.

The historical moment of Enron's collapse, and the inevitable political unravelling foreshadows the opportunity for a conscious appreciation of the distinct possibility for the construction of a new form of social organisation. As Chaisson puts it: "Such states are thereafter starting points for further evolution to other states sometimes characterised by even greater order and complexity." ■

**\* *Cosmic Evolution: The Rise of Complexity in Nature*, Eric J. Chaisson, Harvard University Press, \$27.95**

1. *River out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*, by Richard Dawkins, 1995
2. A lecture by Richard Dawkins extracted from *The Nullifidian* (Dec 94)
3. Reported by Michael Shermer in *Scientific American*, February 2002.
4. [www.discovery.org](http://www.discovery.org). 'The point of view Discovery brings to its work includes a belief in God-given reason and the permanency of human nature; the principles of representative democracy and public service expounded by the American Founders; free market economics domestically and internationally; the social requirement to balance personal liberty with responsibility; the spirit of voluntarism crucial to civil society; the continuing validity of American international leadership; and the potential of science and technology to promote an improved future for individuals, families and communities.'

# Giving the Jews of Britain their own history

**M**ost historians have viewed the Jewish experience in Britain as either one where they are victims of alien laws or fascist attacks or as “success stories”, as politicians, bankers, artists, writers and scientists, as members of respectable English circles.

What Todd Endelman sets out to do in his excellent history\* is to give the Jews who migrated to England a voice of their own, to describe their own internal life.

Through the particular history of the Jews he is thereby able to illustrate the social and political history of Britain as a whole.

The most compelling section deals with the migration to Britain of up to 150,000 poor Jews from Eastern Europe between 1870 and 1914 (more than 850,000 went to the USA in the same period), effecting a radical transformation in the character of Anglo-Jewry.

The most fundamental cause of emigration from Eastern Europe, says Endelman, was the failure of the Jewish economy to grow as rapidly as the Jewish population, rather than the pogroms that swept parts of the region in 1881.

This fact must, of course, be set against the social and economic turmoil in Russia itself, as it moved hesitantly from feudalism to capitalism.

Endelman notes of the new arrivals, who overwhelmed in numbers the Jews already here: “Their poverty, occupations, and foreignness drew unwanted

attention to them and native-born Jews alike, fuelling the fires of xenophobia and anti-Semitism.”

Not only that, their presence “rubbed against the comfortable grain of native Jewish patterns, creating intracommunal friction”.

In religion, they balked at recognising the authority of the chief rabbi, while in politics many embraced socialism, anarchism and Zionism. They built trade unions and collaborated with the local labour movement.

An example was the Union of Hebrew Socialists in London, created by Aron Liberman, a revolutionary who was both for the reform of Jewish society and the overthrow of the Tsarist government.

In Leeds, workers employed in large factories created unions like the Jewish Workers Tailors’ Society. It joined the trades council and later amalgamated with the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers.

Between the wars, Jewish workers played a key role in fighting the fascist movement. The post-war period saw most move out of the East End to be replaced by migrants from another continent. Endelman deals with the subsequent fractures in British Jewry and his is a valuable book. ■

\* *The Jews of Britain 1656 to 2000*. Todd Endelman, University of California Press, £16.95



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# A woman of the revolution

By Cissie Lodge

**T**he story of Inessa Armand could not have been invented, even by the most imaginative of writers.

It's not by chance that Michael Pearson decided to make his account into a biography rather than a novel\*.

The full story – especially her relations with Lenin – could only begin to be told after the Soviet archives were opened in the 1990s. Pearson has also drawn on a biography by the French author Georges Bardawil published in 1993 and Armand family sources. These are pieced together with her own correspondence and the many surviving letters written by Lenin to Inessa.



*Inessa, age 6 with her Aunt Sophie*

**B**orn in Paris in 1874, she was the illegitimate daughter of a French woman and a Parisian opera singer. Brought up near Moscow by her aunt, she married Alexander Armand, in 1893. The wealthy Armand family had an idyllic estate in Pushkino. After bearing Alexander four children, she fell in love with his brother Vladimir. She was increasingly drawn to

Marxism and the revolutionary politics, in which Vladimir, 11 years younger than her, was well versed.

Vladimir used the family apartment in Moscow to hold meetings of radical students, leading to raids by the Czarist police.

Inessa, her husband and his brother, now her lover, amazingly, found a way of continuing life without breaking up their family. An old family servant recalled that after she fell in love with Vladimir “the three of them were sitting on a couch for hours, with Inessa between them, and all of them were crying.... And all the servants in the house were crying too”.

Instead of leaving her to her own devices, her husband continued to maintain her, Pearson writes, “supporting her various causes, paying her bail when she was jailed, as she often would be, and despite her requests for no favours, using what influence he could to gain her release. He aided her escapes when she had to cross borders illegally. He brought up the children when she was away in exile or prison and made sure that the Pushkino home was always available to her as a haven.

He became a stalwart friend as she recognised with gratitude repeatedly”.

Pregnant, accompanied by her children but not her new lover, she spent a year in the Swiss Alps. She used the opportunity to change direction in her life. She broke with the liberal outlook she was born into, and began educating herself in Marxist ideas, reading Lenin's book *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*.

The holiday atmosphere in Switzerland was soon broken by the events of 1905 in Russia to which Inessa had returned. She was arrested in front of her children in a police raid and held in jail for four months. On release she continued to organise illegal meetings and was rearrested.



*Inessa and her husband Alexander soon after their marriage, 1893*

She was banished to a town called Mezen near Archangel in the far north, within one degree of the Arctic Circle for two years. Here she suffered harsh conditions, malaria and witnessed violent beatings of prisoners by the Cossacks.

Inessa Armand finally managed to escape to Poland, but remained a wanted outlaw in Russia. Her lover Vladimir was in France being treated for tuberculosis. He took a sudden turn for the worse and died in her arms, after a desperate journey by Inessa to reach him.

She overcame her desolation at his death and studied in Brussels, travelling to Copenhagen and Paris. It was in Paris that she began to work closely with Lenin, organising the Bolshevik party schools at Longjumeau. Relations between them grew increasingly intense.



She joined Lenin on the famous "sealed train" which took them back to Russia in April 1917 and played a leading role in the struggle to hold on to Soviet power immediately after the revolution. Overwork and the harsh conditions of the Civil War period took their toll on her health. Despite Lenin's constant efforts to help her regain her strength, she succumbed to cholera and died in 1920 aged only 46. Her loss was a huge blow which some believe contributed to Lenin's own death just over two years later.

Inessa's relationship with Lenin is documented closely in this book. When Pearson draws on Inessa's letters to Lenin and her family, the flesh and blood woman appears before us, in all her predicaments and heroism. There were great twists and turns in her life. Some were dictated by historic events outside her control.

But at key moments, it is she who makes the decisions about what she will do with herself. She followed her heart as well as her political conscience, and did not see a conflict between the two. She refused to be intimidated or trapped, whether by the "morality" of bourgeois marriage or the Czar's prisons.

We can learn not only about Inessa, but the circles in which she moved, especially about the women in the leadership of the Bolshevik party, even though Pearson tends to see things in terms of personal rivalries. He is astonished and fascinated by Inessa's personality and dedication to her principles. He views her as a heroic, but tragically misguided idealist. Unfortunately, his

understanding of Russian revolutionary history is drawn from "liberal" and anti-Bolshevik historians such as Robert Service, Richard Pipes and Orlando Figes.

Despite the author's frequent speculation about people's motives and his false accusations against Lenin, the selfless and free-spirited nature of the revolutionaries comes across again and again. The support and love Inessa received from her sister-in-law, Anna Konstaninovich, Lenin's wife Nadezhda Krupskaya, from Lenin himself – and which she reciprocated – shines through the lines of this book.

Pearson depicts the poignancy and depth of her relationships with a sympathetic novelist's mind. He reveals her courage and intelligence even though he is at odds with the philosophy and politics that lay behind these qualities. ■

\* *Inessa – Lenin's Mistress*, by Michael Pearson, is published by Duckworth at £20.



Inessa, 1920 shortly before she died



Inessa in 1910 with her five children



Lenin in 1920

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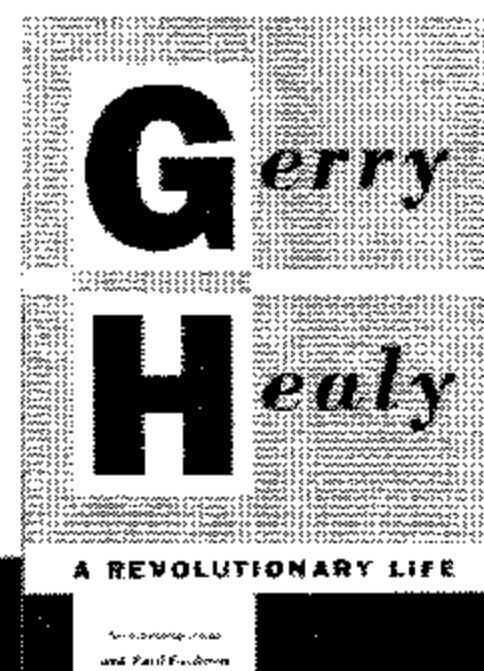
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# The awesome effects of the sublime

by Corinna Lotz

**G**ore Vidal once quipped that America had passed from barbarism to decline without going through civilisation. The grain of truth in his notion is shown by Tate Britain's display of American landscape painting from the 19th century.

An awareness of the fragility of nature under the onslaught of modern capitalism – and a deep unease with where it would take society – is an underlying theme for many of these artists. Sometimes they expressed their concerns in explicit “history painting”.

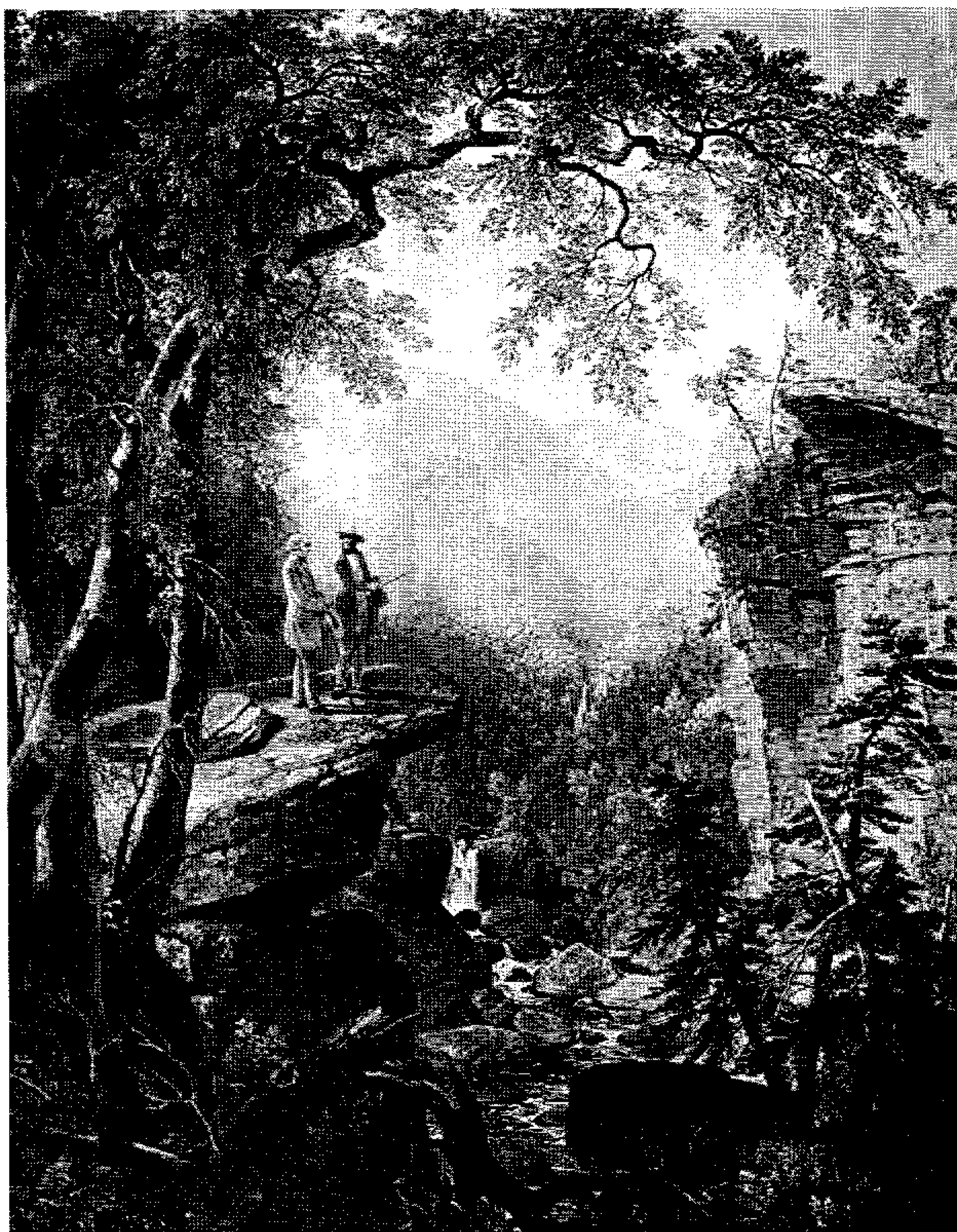
Others focused on the nature they saw around them simply to show its grandeur and unique qualities. In paintings drawn from key public collections in the US, we can see how artists in the US began to paint under the influence of European culture but eventually developed their own styles.

The idea of the “sublime” was an aesthetic principle put forward by 18th century philosophers. The Americans found it suited them well. It reflected the excitement of escaping from the confines of densely populated Europe weighed down by thousands of years of history.

Discovering and charting a vast new continent became a major theme.

**T**he cruel treatment of the indigenous Indian nation and accompanying invasion of the environment is not shown directly in these paintings. On the contrary, painters like Sanford Gifford evoke a wilderness that is not empty of humans, but with Indians living in harmony with it.

*Kindred Spirits*, the iconic painting of American landscape art



*Kindred Spirits*, Asher Durand, 1849

was made by Asher Brown Durand in 1849. It is a tribute to Thomas Cole, seen by many as the founder of the tradition of American “wilderness” painting. It shows the influence of the great French landscapist Claude Lorraine, as well as Constable and Turner.

The romantic admiration of landscape, the vertiginous cliffs

bring to mind German painters such as Caspar David Friedrich. The overarching branch which frames the scene is a device used by Claude as well as Constable.

The notion of appreciating nature directly as an intellectual as well as emotional enterprise also brings to mind the English critic, John Ruskin. The dialogue between the

artist and the writer is similar to a work by the Pre-Raphaelite artist Millais showing himself with Ruskin standing by a stream in Scotland.

Thus the US artists first saw the continent through eyes conditioned by Europe. But the content of their work was the land they saw around them. When this reality broke through the old forms, something fresh and new emerged.

But it did not appear so often in the grandiose showpieces as in the more intimate depiction of particular places. They acquire meaning in the loving and sometimes innovative approach to the subject. But if you are looking for exciting impressionist brushwork, or immediate light effects, you won't find them.

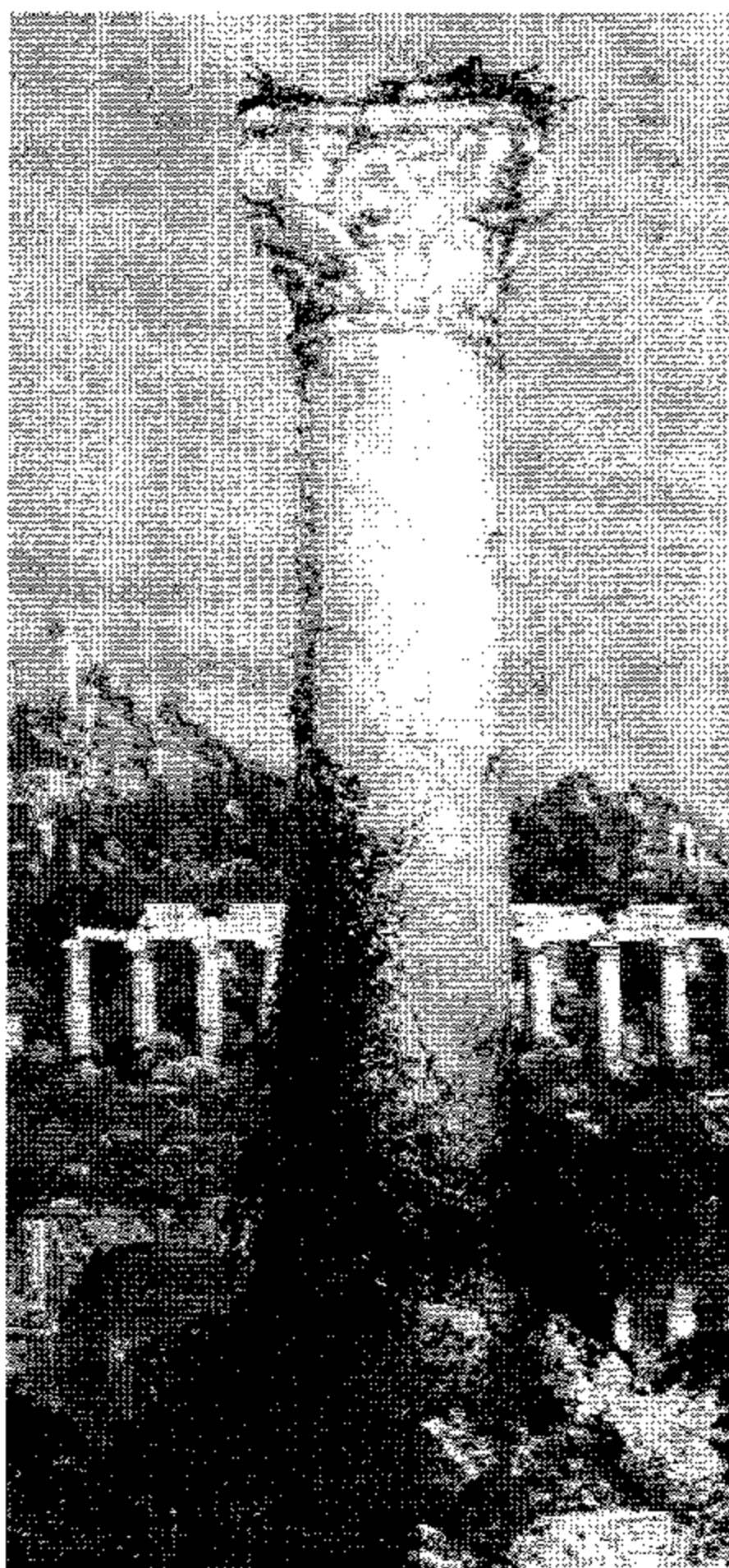
**W**hat we do learn from these works is how artists and others first discovered the nature they saw around them and then absorbed, understood and treasured it as an object of beauty.

Almost invariably, the nature depicted hints at what was already happening – the wanton occupation and destruction of the land by modern capitalism. Broken off trees and stumps were a common spatial device used to create the illusion of depth. But they often create a touch of melancholy, or a feeling of decay.

Cole found drama in cliffs and fir trees glimpsed in the Catskill mountains of New York and New Hampshire. Nature is not seen as peacefully idyllic. Blasted trees and dead stumps become metaphors for the destructive aspect of things, a device used by others like Jasper Cropsey who also found the Catskills a great place to paint.

Upon return from a trip to Rome, Cole was deeply affected by the sight of ancient ruins of the empire, he decided to make a grand historical cycle. A rich patron provided \$2,500 for a cycle of five huge works, called *The Course of Empire*.

They set out phases in the history of humanity and its relation to nature: *Savage State*, *Pastoral or*



*The course of Empire: Desolation, Thomas Cole, 1836*

#### *Arcadian State, Consummation of Empire, Destruction and Desolation.*

The first two depict early stages in the history of human life, set against wild mountains, ocean and forests. In the second, where nature is being tamed, we see flocks of sheep in pastures, a woman spinning and people playing music and dancing. In the distance a pagan temple similar to Stonehenge overlooks the bay.

The third, *Consummation*, looks like a film set for an epic blockbuster with a cast of thousands. There is a hideous overabundance of temples, statues, gold – a picture of consumerism gone mad. It is supposed to represent “the summit of human glory” – but the effect is suffocating and grotesque.

In its time the painting was seen as revealing how “the ostentatious display of riches has succeeded to the efforts of virtuous industry and the study of nature and truth. We see that man has attained power

without the knowledge of its true use: and has already abused it”.

The last painting in the series, the post-holocaust *Desolation*, reverts back to a kind of tranquil beauty. The remnants of architecture achieve a melancholy reverie as ivy creeps up a lonely column. A bird has nested on top, and in general nature is reclaiming its own.

Curator Tim Barrington links the figure of the “conqueror” to the then US president, Andrew Jackson, who was seen as a corrupt representative of the new expansionist ruling class based in New York. As a patrician conservative, Cole felt Jackson's presidency would lead the US to inevitable disaster.

Conservative or not, Cole reflected the intimations of mortality and contempt for imperialist arrogance amongst thinkers in 19th century America. He is a kind of pictorial counterpart of writers like Thomas Carlyle, who denounced early industrial capitalism in Britain.

**I**t must be a sign of “civilisation” that so early in the history of the United States artists and thinkers were already concerned about how human beings developed socially and asked what “civilisation” was about. They were acutely aware that progress had an opposite within it – the threat to environment and humanity.

After completing *The Course of Empire*, Cole left New York city and spent the rest of his life upstate in the Catskill mountains.

Cole was one of the first of the influential Hudson River School. Jasper Cropsey, Sanford Gifford and his pupil, Frederic Church, were also devoted to this beautiful part of New York studying the effects of the sun on the mountains, valleys and trees.

Through other painters we are led from the Catskills further north to Vermont and finally to Maine. The rocky, pine-fringed coasts of Mount Desert island provided a continuous source of inspiration as an untouched wilderness.

There are marine views with a wonderful serenity. We are given a minimalist view of nature by artists like Fitz Hugh Lane and John Kensett. Views of empty shores and sea, ships resting in harbours, the effects of storm and sunlight show acute observation and daring sense of colour.

The final section takes us to the far west and South America, exploring new parts of the continent, including South America and the Far West. Grandiose views, like the Niagara Falls, the Yosemite Valley and the Rocky Mountains showed the folks back home what extraordinary sights nature could offer. But the days of such monumental efforts were numbered as photography on the one side, and a new way of looking at nature – Impressionism – on the other, stole the ground from under the attempt to depict the awesome effects of the sublime. ■

**American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820-1880** is at Tate Britain, Millbank, until May 19. Admission £8/£6. Open daily 10-17.40. [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)



Niagara Falls from the American side. Frederic Church, 1867. National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh



Bernini: Angel with the Crown of Thorns, 1668 – Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas

## Earth & fire

How did sculptors in Renaissance Italy bring the reality of the human body into sculpture? A unique selection of terracotta sculpture at the V&A museum unlocks some of the secrets of the creative process that revolutionised culture in the late 15th century.

Drawing on techniques used in antiquity, sculptors like Ghiberti, Giambologna and Donatello developed a new way of creating art for a wider audience. Instead of beginning with the most intractable material – stone – they began

modelling in wet clay. This material was extremely cheap and could be shaped into the most delicate of forms.

Lorenzo Ghiberti, best known for his spectacular biblical narrative on the portals of Sienna cathedral, found he could model in clay, achieving the most refined effects. It could be glazed so that it looked like more precious materials and sold to the rising middle classes. Thus the humblest of materials could be transformed into the most divine images, in the different meanings of the word “divine”.

The popular image of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus is shown here as presented by Florence’s top sculptors – Michelozzo, Donatello and Luca della Robbia. They incorporate the latest discoveries in perspective, so that the low relief images spring out



of the wall as three-dimensional sculptures, playing with our sense of illusion.

In the late Renaissance and Mannerist period that followed, artists like Michelangelo and Giambologna used modelling in terracotta as three dimensional sketching. Most of these models have disappeared over time, but the V&A has unearthed a number of amazing treasures like Giambologna's *River God*, which might have been made by Rodin, three hundred years later.

The immediacy of the sculptor's hand is palpable and exciting. There is a flow of energy as the movement of water which the God represents merges with the twisting of the body in a dynamic spiral.

A group of clay sketches by the protean genius Gian Lorenzo Bernini shows the continuous studies in which he perfected his vision and technique. From sketches on paper and 3-D models in clay he then moved on to the challenge of capturing life in marble.

This exhibition brings together, for example, two drawings and six

studies made by Bernini for the famous marble angels which were placed on the bridge of Sant'Angelo in Rome. There are two amazing models for one of his last works, *The Blessed Ludovica Albertoni*. It is an extremely "baroque" work, showing a woman apparently in her death agony. But the movement of the drapery is so energetic as to portray an ecstatic denial of death – not for the weak-hearted this!

The products of Bernini's genius and other baroque masters still grace the streets, squares, fountains and churches of his native Rome. But here in London we can see the complex process that enabled him to make his masterpieces as though in frozen moments of evolution. As ever, the unbearable lightness of being is underpinned by a tremendous dedication to skilled labour! ■

**Earth and Fire: Italian terracotta sculpture from Donatello to Canova is at the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington until July 7. Admission to the museum is free. Enquiries at 020 7942 2000**

## Baroque painting in Genoa

The power of 17th century Genoa lay in its international trading and banking network. Even the gold-rich Spanish monarchy had to borrow money from this maritime city-state to finance its wars and naval adventures. As a result wealthy families in the Genoese republic employed world famous artists like Rubens and Van Dyck to portray them in heroic poses and aristocratic clothing. According to curator Gabriele Finaldi, one dress could cost nine times the annual pay of a Genoese labourer.

To keep the poor entranced by Catholicism, the Baroque style often included striking images of the lower classes. Plus increasing powers of observation combined with dramatic lighting gave "sacred" images touches of reality and humour. In Castiglione's *Adoration of the Shepherds*, for example, one bearded rustic, who looks more like a satyr than a shepherd, plays on a bassoon to mother and child.

**At the National Gallery until June 16 Admission free**



Rubens: *Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1606 Soprintendenza della Liguria, Genova

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