

Britain: Blair's apologia for Iraq war on eve of Bush visit

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12 November 2003

Every year Britain's serving prime minister delivers a speech dealing with foreign policy to the Lord Mayor of London's official banquet, dressed in white tie and tails. This year Tony Blair's thoughts were immediately focused on an event closer to home—the upcoming state visit by US President George W. Bush taking place November 19-21.

There are a series of demonstrations planned to oppose Bush's visit, denouncing the joint US/British war against Iraq and the subsequent occupation of the country. The protests will number in the tens of thousands and have already forced a curtailment of the initial agenda planned for Bush. A customary open carriage ride down the Mall has been cancelled amidst growing security fears. Around 3,800 British police have been drafted in to cover the events at a cost of £4 million, who have special powers to stop and arrest under the anti-terror legislation brought in on the back of the September 11 atrocities. On top of this up to 250 armed US secret service agents will be on hand and the president's officials have even asked for the centre of London to be cordoned off.

Blair felt it incumbent upon him to justify the visit, but to do so he had to address the wider issues involved—the source of the massive opposition to Bush and himself in their criminal venture in the Middle East.

His appeal was remarkably defensive. He began by reasserting his fundamental axis for Britain's foreign policy, a need to maintain an alliance between the US and the European Union with Britain at its centre. But he acknowledged, "At present, I accept, there is a fairly narrow constituency for this view", and it was threatened by eurosceptics on the one hand and a "resurgent anti-Americanism" on the other.

After making these points he made a somewhat pathetic plea to his critics to forgive and forget the past. There could be "entirely legitimate disagreement" over the Iraq war, but the issue as far Blair is concerned is what is

happening now and how the fate of Iraq will unfold.

Here Blair made an extraordinary admission as to how the mass of the population in Britain, internationally and in the Middle East in particular see the present conflict.

The fate of Iraq will determine the future course of world politics, Blair said, because "it will test the validity of the view of those whose protest goes far wider than merely condemnation of the war in Iraq and extends to the whole of American and UK foreign policy. For this large body of people, the coalition is an army of occupation; its purpose is to suppress the Muslim population of Iraq: we are out to steal Iraq's oil; and, even if they abhor the methods of those causing terror in Iraq, they will say we've brought it on ourselves. Their view is: you should never have been there, and get out now. That is the view of parts of the Arab and Muslim street and a significant part of western opinion and certainly of the developing world.

"More than that, these people say: the whole episode of Iraq is the epitome of the way the US/UK treat the Arab and Muslim world. It is a form of colonialism, that seeks to impose its culture, its rules and its beliefs on its unwilling victims."

Blair's mission, as he sees it, is to disprove and discredit the widely held conception that what is taking place is a colonial style occupation of an oppressed nation by the US and British aggressors. But his attempt to do so is crippled from the start by the reality of what is taking place in Iraq.

He tried to combat broad based anti-imperialist sentiment by hailing the supposedly glorious achievements of the puppet administration in Baghdad and attributing all of Iraq's problems to a handful of dissidents determined to prevent a flowering of democracy and prosperity under the benevolent guardianship of Washington and London.

Posing the question what is happening in Iraq, he

answered that the country was on the way to full democracy, there were 40,000 Iraqi police on duty, a free media, open schools and universities, an on going programmes to rebuild the infrastructure, etc. "These supposedly evil Americans have voted \$19 billion of their own money in aid: the Madrid Conference under the excellent guidance of Prime Minister Aznar has raised another \$13 billion. Not a penny piece of Iraq's oil money has gone anywhere but into an account under the supervision of the IMF and UN."

"And what is the barrier to progress?" he then asked. "Saddam's small rump of supporters aided and abetted by foreign terrorists", who "know that if we give Iraq democracy, set it on a path to prosperity, leave it in the sole charge and sovereignty of the Iraqi people, its oil its own, its citizens free to worship in the way they wish, Muslim and non-Muslim, that means not just the rebirth of Iraq, it means the death of the poisonous propaganda monster about America these extremists have created in the minds of much of the world."

Blair concluded his apologetics with one final appeal to those intent on protesting Bush's visit:

"Attack the decision to go to war... But accept that the task now is not to argue about what has been, but to make what is happening now, work and work for the very Iraqis we all say we want to help."

There is something faintly ludicrous about Blair. He is a man without any grasp of history or any real understanding of social processes and how these shape popular consciousness. Surrounded as he is by yes men and people whose role in life is to foist unpopular policies on an unwilling public, he believes fervently in the power of media management and, most important of all, in the ability of force to convince.

In his view the might of US imperialism will eventually sort out Iraq and thereby confound his opponents, when in reality it is the might of US imperialism, employed as it is in an aggressive colonialist adventure, that acts as the breeding ground for political discontent.

Blair's claims will convince no one who does not wish to be convinced. Few share his rose tinted view of the intentions of the Bush administration. When they see Bush they see the representative of a financial oligarchy intent on securing its domination of the globe by military force. They are aware of the president's connections with the oil giants, Vice-President Dick Cheney's relations with Haliburton and the fact that Iraq's future has been placed in hock to US corporations for the foreseeable future.

Even a compliant and often corrupt media cannot gloss over the devastation suffered by Iraq, nor the failure of the coalition powers to reconstruct the country. And the efforts to identify opposition to the occupation with a handful of Ba'athist recidivists and foreign extremists cannot be squared with the daily reports of popular unrest and the jubilation which greets every setback suffered by the US.

On top of all this few within Britain will swallow Blair's attempts to take the moral high ground after more than six years in which his government has presided over devastating attacks on workers' living standards and has joined a war of aggression on trumped up charges, in open defiance of the popular opinion and international law. They will rightly conclude that Blair's desire for US success in Iraq has nothing to do with a commitment to democracy and everything to do with his mercenary efforts to ensure that Britain's elite shares in the spoils of war.

There can not be any accommodation with the war criminals in Washington and London. No opponent of the war of conquest waged by US and British imperialism has any responsibility to now endorse its results supposedly in order to aid the Iraqis.

Workers in Britain should treat Blair's sophistries with the contempt they deserve and respond by redoubling their political opposition to his government. The starting point for any progressive resolution of the crisis facing Iraq is the immediate withdrawal of all coalition forces and the payment of full compensation by the aggressors for the damage they caused, and to allow the Iraqi people to determine their own fate.

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