

***Rough Music: Blair/Bombs/Baghdad/London/Terror, Tariq Ali***  
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This is an angry and polemical book. I mean that as a compliment. For how can the social critic write without anger in what Tariq Ali (p 64) calls 'these scoundrel times'? Times when governments lie to their people, to drag them against the will and good sense of the majority, into illegal wars in the name of democracy and the rule of law. When the state kidnaps, imprisons without trial, and tortures, and unleashes reigns of terror, for the sake of enlightenment, progress and civilisation (pp 76–81, p 43).

The polemic resounds with the moral outrage to be found in Marx, whom Tariq Ali quotes with reference to the decomposing principles of former left-liberal journalists, who came to approve the "humanitarian interventions" from 30,000 feet over Kosovo and Baghdad: 'Putrefaction ... is the laboratory of life' (pp 42–3). Indeed, more virulent scorn is reserved for the betrayals, cynicism and hypocrisies of natural allies, such as Labour Party politicians and those left-liberal reporters, than for leaders and leader-writers of the reactionary right. Marx's contempt for the 'lickspittles' of capitalism is echoed in Tariq Ali's excoriation of the toadying (p 40) which (along with bullying) he shows to be characteristic of Tony Blair's New Labour.

Satirist Tom Lehrer famously declared satire to be superceded when Henry Kissinger was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Perhaps polemics is similarly obsolete in the light of the crassness of the Blair government itself. Early in the book (p 4), Tariq Ali quotes Blair's biographer Anthony Seldon as reporting an instruction given by Blair's Chief of Staff to the new Blair-appointed Ambassador to Washington, Christopher Meyer, in 1997: 'Your job is to get up the arse of the White House and stay there'. This political imperative is the major explanatory factor in the book for the linkages between Blair, bombs, Baghdad and terror. Blair's 'muscular Christianity' (p 12) merely provides the tone.

Tariq Ali refers to Tony Blair's planning with George W Bush to participate in the illegal invasion of Iraq, by using that country's non-existent 'weapons of mass destruction' (WMD) as a pretext to sell the decision to an unwilling British populace as 'legal justification for the use of force'. The last-quoted words, along with the admission that 'the case was thin', (p 6) are contained in an officially secret 'Memo on Iraq' of 23 July 2002, leaked to the *Sunday Times* in May 2005 and reproduced in full as Appendix One to this book (pp 91–94). 'The intelligence and the facts were being fixed around the policy' of the Bush regime that military invasion of Iraq was necessary, recorded the memo (p 5).

Notwithstanding this, Blair publicly humiliated Dr David Kelly, a government scientist and former member of the weapons inspection program, for being the source of the BBC story that his government had 'sexed up' evidence of WMD to rationalise going to war, a saga which is traced in detail in Chapter 3: 'The Media Cycle' (pp 25–43). Kelly suicided following a grueling appearance before a parliamentary select committee. Blair's spin-doctoring cronies (and their accomplices in the media) then famously went after the BBC journalist, Andrew Gilligan, and ultimately the BBC Director-General, Greg Dyke. '[T]he real sin was to demonstrate independence' (p 38).

The official inquiry to the 'sexing up' allegations, produced a 'whitewash' (p 33) and condemned the broadcaster for alleging without evidence that the Blair government knew that its assertions that Saddam Hussein had WMD missiles primed for use in 45 minutes were false. That evidence of knowing falsehood is now available, and is usefully presented in his book. The inquiry had been placed in 'a safe pair of hands' (p 35), those of Lord Hutton, who (as Sir Brian Hutton) had been one of the 'carefully vetted' judges sitting on notoriously corrupted Diplock courts in Northern Ireland, when trial by jury was suspended in 1972 (p 32). In 1972, Hutton had represented the British Army on the inquiry into Bloody Sunday which had produced a complete whitewash. One of Blair's close advisers is quoted as saying, 'Don't worry, we appointed the right judge' (p 31).

Chapter 4 deals briefly with the London bombings of July 2005, and the overwhelming evidence (including a recorded statement by one of the bombers) that they were a response to Britain's part in the Iraq war. This blindingly obvious conclusion, endorsed by 66 per cent of the British population (p 50), has been rejected by Tony Blair (p 53), as it has by Australia's Prime Minister. The 'political-media bubble', according to Tariq Ali, is determined to deny and to obscure any such causal links (p 49).

Chapter 5 details the 'Public Execution "In Good Faith"' of Jean Charles de Menezes on the Tube train at Stockwell Station on 22 July 2005. This innocent 27-year old Brazilian electrician on his way to work was mistaken for a terrorist, and shot dead with seven bullets to the head by special forces, which Tariq Ali adduces testimony to show were 'probably ... an SAS unit' (p 64), acting under 'shoot to kill' orders. Forces involved had been selected and trained by the SAS (pp 56–8). The Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Ian Blair, announced falsely some hours later that de Menezes was 'directly linked' to the anti-terrorist investigation which had included surveillance of the block of flats where the Brazilian lived (p 58). The media liaison flacks at the Met then spun the mendacious story that de Menezes was wearing a bulky coat -- obviously a good reason to spot him as a terrorist. He had actually worn a light denim jacket. It was alleged that he had vaulted the ticket barrier, when in reality he had used his electronic pass to enter normally. It was falsely asserted that he had run from police, whereas he had in fact walked calmly to the train, boarded, sat down, and begun reading the paper. The headlines dutifully reported the untruth that a 'train bomber' had been killed. (They announced the same in Australia). By the time they were reporting the terrible mistake, they were assiduous in exculpating the police, and even the liberal *Guardian* was justifying the 'shoot to kill' policy (p 59).

Tariq Ali surmises that 'a premeditated execution was ordered'. He asks rhetorically whether such 'taking out' is employed '[a]s a deterrent in a country where capital punishment is forbidden' (p 64). He reasons that such 'public execution' cannot possibly deter suicide bombers, it can only put off dark-skinned people from taking the tube. The Brazilian, it had been reported, had South Asian appearance.

The penultimate chapter details the attack on civil liberties inherent in the battery of 'anti-terror' laws and measures introduced after 11 September 2001, including incarceration without trial, limiting the right to silence, further intercepting of communications and otherwise invading privacy, criminalisation of asylum seekers, and the introduction of identity cards (pp 73–4). For Australian readers, *de te fabula narratur*: this story is told of you.

This chapter also details and condemns the increasing use of torture by Britain, and its complicity with that practised by the United States. British residents have been tortured in the US enclave at Guantanamo Bay. Britain has subjected 'terrorist suspect' detainees at Belmarsh and Woodhill Prisons to 'psychological torture', occasioning and exacerbating

mental illness (p 80). Nor is such torture confined to the present 'war on terror'. 'I have been in torture photos, too', told Gerry Adams in a *Guardian* article in 2004, reprinted as Appendix Two in this book. He details the torture methods practised under British custody in Northern Ireland, from the hooding to the beatings, to the burnings with matches and cigarettes, to the anal penetrations, to the menacing with weapons, to the humiliating trophy photos: all now globally familiar from Abu Ghraib (pp 95–98). Evidence extracted in other countries under torture has been used in British legal proceedings, and the British government is planning to deport foreign nationals whom it suspects of being terrorism risks to countries where they will face certain torture, provided the worthless official undertakings are given by their governments to supposedly safeguard against this (p 83).

This is harsh matter to read, and harrowing to absorb. It is occasionally alleviated by wicked one-liners like, 'Labour's reform of the House of Lords has been the constitutional equivalent of a Michael Jackson facelift' (p 87). The book, like the joke, will not be to everyone's taste (though it certainly is to mine). Yet there is no doubting the gravity of its charges. Its title is taken from E P Thompson, 'rough music' being the cacophonous public ridicule for unacceptable behaviour, intended as a folk measure to insult and chastise the offender. This is a book for the people, and I for one hope that it is taken up by masses and rings in many ears.

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