

A regime with blood on its hands

Almost eight years ago, the choir of British liberalism celebrated a new age. Tony Blair, wrote the liberal thinker Hugo Young, “wants to create a world none of us have known”, a world which “ideology has surrendered entirely to ‘values’ [and where] there are no sacred cows . . . no fossilised limits to the ground over which the mind might range in search of a better Britain”.

Besotted minds ranged far. In a Tonier-than-thou piece for the Guardian, Martin Kettle hilariously declared Blair an honorary Australian. “He is not in awe of the past,” he wrote. “He is not intimidated by class. He is a meritocrat, a doer . . . He is simply happy making his own history . . . It would be nice to think that one day these would be thought of as British characteristics, too.”

Former Labour Party deputy leader Roy Hattersley described one of the most ideological regimes in modern British history as “untainted by dogma”; Blair was “taking the politics out of politics”.

“Goodbye, xenophobia,” was the Observer’s post-election front page, and “The Foreign Office says, Hello world, remember us?”. The Blair government, said the paper, would push for “new worldwide rules on human rights” and implement “tough new limits on arms sales”.

Let’s pause to consider the truth. When Blair demonstrably lied about weapons of mass destruction in order to help an extremist regime launch an unprovoked attack on Iraq, a defenceless country, the Foreign Office’s deputy legal adviser Elizabeth Wilmshurst resigned, calling it, correctly, a “crime of aggression”. The blood shed by more than 100,000 civilians killed and 300,000 injured is her and our witness. Now consider the “tough new limits on arms sales”. A study by Action-Aid reveals that the Blair government has sold weapons to 14 impoverished African countries where there is internal conflict. The people of Aceh, stricken by last year’s tsunami, have been terrorised by British-supplied Hawk fighter jets,

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machine-guns and ammunition. Britain is a world leader in the export of small arms, even depleted uranium.

Almost everything about a Blair regime was known before it was elected. Blair's Vichy-like devotion to Washington was known: read his speeches about a 'new order led by America'. His devotion to Rupert Murdoch, who flew him and Cherie Booth around the world first class, was known. His devotion to an extreme neoliberal Thatcherite economics was known, spelled out in Peter Mandelson's and Roger Liddle's 'The Blair Revolution: can new Labour deliver', in which Britain's "economic strengths" are listed as multinational corporations, the "aerospace" (arms) industry and "the pre-eminence of the City of London". His class contempt for the poor was known; his pre-election attacks on single mothers passed quickly into law, assisted by the majority of his new, opportunistic female MPs.

Those trying to cover for Blair and "move on" from Iraq refer to the reduction of poverty as one of his "achievements". In fact, relative poverty in childless households in the UK has reached record levels under Blair, up to 13 per cent – and a greater number than under Margaret Thatcher or John Major. A certain PC-ism, such as the sound and fury over dropping the gay age of consent, adds to the illusion of a Labour government that, had it not fallen in with the awful Bush, would be celebrated as "progressive". Tell that to the people of a faraway country, more than half of whom are children, whose lives have been devastated by the fanatical Blair and his court of apologists. Read the robotic Hoon's statement on the use of cluster bombs – how Iraqi mothers would one day be "grateful" for the use of weapons that killed their children – and Ministry of Defence letters to the public that lie about depleted uranium and its Hiroshima effect. The silence of those who regard themselves as commissars of this country's and Europe's respectable, moral, liberal class is quite disgusting.

In a superb piece in the Guardian (24 February), Victoria Brittain asked: "How can it be that not one mainstream public figure in Europe has denounced [Bush's systematic torture regime]?" She points out that The Torture Papers – more than 1,200 pages of government memos and reports, edited at New York University – shows systematic torture, approved and directed from on high. Such is the regime of a man with whom Blair "shares values". I thought of this when I noted the current debate in the Church of England about the "rift" caused by the "issue" of gay marriage. Compare that with the "issue" of the slaughter of tens of thousands of innocent people, about which not a word is heard from those who claim moral courage as a deity. Read the searing account of Dr Salam Ismael, who took aid to

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Fallujah in January. He describes the ordeal of a 17-year-old girl, Hudda Fawzi. Her father opened the door to US marines who shot him and a friend dead, then shot her elder sister, having beaten her senseless, then destroyed the family's furniture. Wounded people were dragged from their homes and run over by tanks; a clinic was destroyed by missiles. "It became clear to us," Ismael wrote, "that we were witnessing the aftermath of a massacre, the cold-blooded butchery of helpless and defenceless civilians."

It is not surprising that the Blair government has refused Ismael fresh permission to visit and speak out in Britain. His testimony, and that of many other reliable witnesses, is known and feared. Last April, the US command agreed that it may well have slaughtered as many as 600 people in Fallujah. When a listener asked Judy Swallow, presenter of the BBC World Service Newshour programme, why the BBC continued to suppress this truth, Swallow sent this email to a colleague: "Oh god Mike – do you take care of these sorts of things, or do we ignore them?" On the BBC website, she describes Newshour as "exposing injustice and challenging lies". The silence is almost never broken by those paid to "expose injustice and challenge lies", let alone set the record straight.

On Channel 5, a member of the public, Neil Coppendale from Shoreham-by-Sea, confronted Blair with this question: "Bearing in mind that tens of thousands of innocent men, women and children have died as a result of the invasion of Iraq, how do you sleep at night, Mr Blair?" When did a journalist, one with privileged access to Blair, ever ask that? For their part, the BBC's Downing Street man Andrew Marr (apparently together with his wife) and his colleague from the Today programme James Naughtie have been over to the Prime Minister's country home, Chequers, to sup with the killer Blair. It was Marr who, at the fall of Baghdad, told viewers that Blair had "said they would be able to take Baghdad without a bloodbath, and in the end the Iraqis would be celebrating, and on both these points he has been proved conclusively right". And it is Naughtie who has played a leading role in the British American Project, set up by Ronald Reagan to find a "successor generation" to those who propagated the cold war on America's behalf.

If shame has no place in what is called "public life", then the rest of us should break their silence for them. The Guardian says the electorate is "cross" with Blair. Cross? Such a genteel word. Supporting Blair, in his propaganda and his contemptuous need for another term of office, is supporting mass murder.