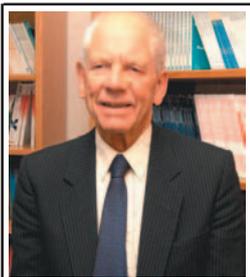


The Private of the Buffs

EARNING HONOUR

Norman Dennis



Norman Dennis

There are interesting cultural similarities and cultural contrasts between the war in Iraq in the twenty-first century, in which the United States played a leading role, and the wars in China in the nineteenth century, in which Great Britain played a leading role.

The oil trade was at stake in Iraq. The opium trade was at stake in China. *The Cambridge History of China* estimated that opium was the world's most valuable single commodity traded in the nineteenth century.¹ It was the second most important source of revenue to the British administration in India. Opium imports into China paid for Chinese tea and silk for the British market. The duty on tea imported into Britain was in turn important for British government revenues.

America, France and Russia had important stakes in Chinese imports and exports, and like Britain wanted to force the country to open itself to trade, so that the China wars took on something of the nature of a world war.²

Unlike, oil, however, which is essential to the existence of American life in its present form, opium was not needed in Britain itself. Opium preparations such as Dover's Powders were readily available without prescription. Tincture of opium (laudanum) was cheap enough to be within the means of even lowest-paid worker. It was used by poor people as a sedative for children, especially by mothers working in the fields of Eastern England. De Quincey, Byron, Shelley and Coleridge were all celebrated users of opium.

But by the standards of the twenty-first century, recreational use

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was extremely limited in the general British population. It is hard to find the claim, even today, that recreational opium use either was a problem in Britain in the nineteenth century or was regarded as one of any degree of seriousness as a matter of medical, economic, law-and-order, religious, educational or political concern.³ There was far less drug-taking in the nineteenth century than today, and in the course of the nineteenth century drunkenness was much reduced in all classes as a personal, family and societal problem.

But in China opium use was a very serious problem. By 1838, 2,000 tons of mainly Indian opium were being sold on the Chinese market. Opium use in China was widely recognised in Britain as well as by the Chinese authorities as an enormous problem for Chinese society.

That mighty China had been the helpless prey of Europeans in the nineteenth century because of opium was not lost on Mao Tse Tung. He used drugs as a weapon of war. In the Civil War, he flooded unconquered provinces with drugs. When he had conquered a province, he suppressed the drug trade and drug use mercilessly. In Vietnam, he ensured that American troops were kept well supplied with drugs at prices they could easily afford.

Public opposition in Britain to the Chinese opium trade and eventually to the three Opium Wars was comparable to the earlier successful campaigns against the slave trade and slavery in the British Empire.

Concerned about the effects of opium addiction on the citizens of Canton, on 24 March

1839 the city's Governor-General, Lin Tse-hsu, declared opium imports to be unlawful. The Canton authorities confiscated supplies of opium, blockaded warehouses and arrested 350 foreigners, many of them British. This was the *casus belli* of the First Opium War. In May 1841 British gunboats bombarded Canton, and on 28 August 1842, at the end of the military campaign, the defeated Chinese signed the Treaty of Nanking. The Treaty of Nanking opened five ports to free trade (the "Treaty Ports"); ceded Hong Kong to Great Britain; and established that British citizens in China could be tried only in a British court.



Chinese Troops of the Period

As in England now, there were advocates of legalisation as a response to the drug problem. Legalisation was advocated by Heu Nailzi, one of the most distinguished Chinese statesmen—on the grounds that the state should make a profit out of the ineradicable vices of its subjects, not on the grounds that legalisation would suppress drug-taking:

‘But after a full deliberation, in which all the high officers of the Empire shared, and which extended over a period of more than a year’s duration, the Chinese Government decided that: “On account of the injuries it inflicted on the people, the nefarious traffic should not be legalized”. ... In 1853, Hien Fang, the present Emperor, under still more distressed circumstances, and with the full knowledge of the futility of all efforts at stopping the increasing import of opium, persevered in the stern policy of his ancestors.’⁴

On 8 October 1856 uniformed Chinese soldiers had boarded the Arrow, a junk or a lorcha.

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The Arrow had a Chinese owner and a Chinese crew, but it carried a British-colonial registration, and the Chinese authorities therefore had no jurisdiction over it. The captain was British.

The police suspected that the Arrow had been engaged in an act of piracy. The Chinese crew was arrested. The Union flag had been lowered and torn (the British claimed). These events together became the *casus belli* for what is variously called the 'Lorcha War', the 'Arrow War', the 'Second Opium War' or the 'Second China War'.⁵

Parkes, the British consul in Canton, demanded an apology for the insult offered to the British flag, and the release of the crew. The crew was released, but the Governor-General of Canton, Yeh, refused to acknowledge that anything improper had occurred. The Canton authorities denied that the flag was on the mast when the soldiers boarded the vessel, therefore there was no question of it being either lowered or torn. (According to a recent left-wing commentator, not only were the Chinese right in claiming that the Union Jack had not been flying—the Hong Kong registration had elapsed, and the Arrow had indeed been guilty of piracy.⁶)

Palmerston was Prime Minister. A few years before, when he was Foreign Secretary, Palmerston had established the doctrine in the so-called 'Don Pacifico Incident' that Britain had the right to protect British subjects from injustice wherever they might live. In 1850 Don Pacifico, a Portuguese who had British citizenship because he had been born in Gibraltar, had been subjected to an anti-Semitic outrage in Athens. In support of Don Pacifico's demand for compensation from the Greek government, Palmerston sent a naval squadron to blockade the Greek coast. Palmerston was censured by the Lords, but won the support of the Commons.

Palmerston had also expressed the view in 1850 that the world's 'half-civilised governments' required 'a dressing down every eight or ten years to kept them in order'. The time was 'fast coming when we would have to strike another blow in China'.⁷

In response to the Arrow incident, Palmerston widened the Don Pacifico doctrine to include

people under British protection. In Palmerston's eyes this now included the crew of a British registered vessel. The Governor of Hong Kong, Sir John Bowring, was authorised to send war ships to Canton.

From Palmerston's point of view, British jurisdiction over a Hong Kong registered ship had been violated, a crew under British protection had been arrested and there had been an affront to the British flag.

From the point of view of the Chinese, the Arrow incident was entirely about imperial domination, and not at all about either justice or honour.⁸

On 23 October 1856 the war ships were in place and Sir John Bowring ordered a naval bombardment of Canton and its forts. The bombardment of the city heightened Chinese resentment, and in the course of riots on 15 December 1856 European property was set on fire. The British therefore inflicted further reprisals, sinking many Chinese commercial vessels.

When the news of the attack on Canton reached London, it was widely condemned. The government sought the protection of a legal ruling. The conclusion of the Attorney General, Richard Bethell, was that international law was not applicable when dealing with 'barbarous states'.⁹



The Royal Kent Regiment's Insignia

Though Palmerston survived a vote of no confidence in House of Lords, he lost it in the House of Commons, where the representatives of industrial capitalism, Richard Cobden and John Bright, led the opposition to the war.

Palmerston dissolved Parliament, and stood for re-election on the platform that 'an insolent barbar-

ian' had 'violated the British flag'. He secured a landslide victory in the general election of April 1857. Richard Cobden, who had moved the vote of no confidence, lost his seat. The British electorate had thus endorsed Bowring's attack on Canton. James Bruce, eighth Earl of Elgin, was appointed Plenipotentiary to China, and sailed with a fleet and army to Canton.

British reinforcements under Lord Elgin arrived at Canton a year later, having been diverted en route to help suppress the Indian Mutiny. France joined the 'coalition of the willing', the *casus belli* in the French case being 'the Father Chepdelaine incident', the murder of a French missionary in the interior of China.

Even Elgin felt that the war was not morally justified, but pursued the course that duty demanded. On 22 December 1857 he wrote in his diary:

*English men-of-war are now anchored in front of the town. I have never felt so ashamed of myself in my life. ... I feel I am earning myself a place in the litany immediately after 'plague, pestilence and famine'. I believe, however that, as far as I am concerned, it was impossible for me to do other than as I have done.*¹⁰

Thirty-two warships shelled Canton throughout the day of 28 December (the Massacre of the Innocents in the Christian year). They shelled the city all the next night. The bombardment stopped on the morning of 29 December 1857. According to Elgin's secretary, Laurence Oliphant, it had killed 200 civilians.

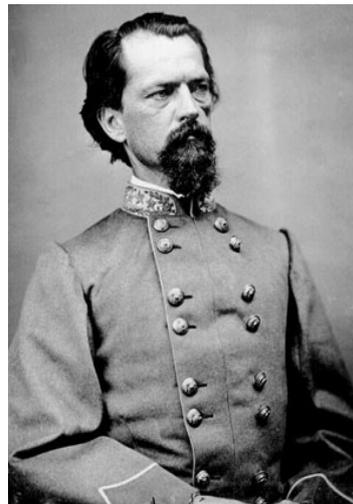
When the ground troops stormed the city of a million and a half later that day, eight British soldiers and two French soldiers were killed. One hundred and ten soldiers were wounded.

The attack, Oliphant wrote, had made a deep impression 'upon a population whose habitual insolence had rendered it extremely desirable that they should be aware of the power we possessed'.¹¹

Elgin had to struggle to maintain discipline among the victorious British and French soldiers and sailors, but when the expeditionary force left Canton he expressed satisfaction that he had

succeeded in checking 'the disposition to maltreat this unfortunate people'.¹²

The victorious armies marched north along the coast to the Taku forts, which defended the mouth of Peiho, the river route to Beijing. The forts were taken on 20 May 1858. When the British and French armies took Tientsin, the Chinese capitulated. The Second Opium War ended with the Treaty of Tientsin under which the Emperor was required to open five new Treaty Ports, free the Yangtze Kiang to international traffic, and legalise the opium trade in China.



General Gordon of Khartoum

In June 1859 the Chinese made difficulties about the route the British forces could use under the terms of the treaty of Tientsin to travel to Beijing in order to install the British Ambassador.

The way that the Chinese wars had interrupted trade in the 1850s instead of fostering it was a reason for British commercial interests to hold back from a third war. Marx wrote:

The impending Third China War is anything but popular with the British mercantile classes. In 1857 they bestrode the British lion, because they expected great commercial profits from a forcible opening of the Chinese market. At this moment, they feel, on the contrary, rather angry at seeing the fruits of the treaty obtained, all at once snapped away from their hold. They know that affairs look menacing enough in Europe and India, without the further complication of a Chinese war on a grand scale. They have not forgotten that, in 1857, the imports of tea fell by upward of 24 millions of pounds, that being the article almost exclusively exported from Canton, which was then the exclusive theatre of war, and they apprehend that this interruption of trade by war may now be extended to Shanghai and the other trading ports of the Celestial Empire. After a first Chinese war undertaken by the English in the interest of opium smuggling, and a second war carried on for the defence of the lorcha of a pirate, nothing was wanted for a climax but

*a war extemporised for the purpose of pestering China with the nuisance of permanent Embassies at its capital.*¹³

In the battle to clear the route, the British were routed in an assault on the Taku forts. H.M. ships Kestrel, Cormorant, Lee and Plover were sunk, and 519 British soldiers were killed—the ‘Taku Repulse’.

Elgin assembled 13,000 British and Indian troops, and the French 7,000, for the Second Battle of the Taku forts—the beginning of the Third Opium War. Taku was successfully assaulted on 21 August 1860. This battle will be referred to again in detail below.

The expeditionary force pressed on the Tientsin, and parleyed with the Chinese. But on the eve of negotiations, the Chinese seized a number of British and French officers who were under a flag of truce. Thirteen of the British officers died of mistreatment. The British and French marched on Beijing. Outside the city walls the Summer Palace was pillaged, first by the French troops (6–9 October 1860). The commander of the British troops, Sir Hope Grant, believing he could not maintain the discipline of his own troops who were looking on as the French plundered freely, then sanctioned the looting by the British of what remained. The treasures thus collected were sold by auction among the officers and men of the British force by a specially selected committee of officers. The money realized at this auction was divided at the ratio of one third to the officers and two thirds to the men, each private soldier receiving about £4 as his share. ‘It was wretchedly demoralising work for an army’, wrote Captain Gordon (later famous as General Gordon of Khartoum). The Summer Palace was then destroyed at the direct order of the allied chiefs.

The guns were in position to blow in one of the great gates of the city when the Chinese surrendered (13 October 1860). The Third China War was concluded when the Chinese ratified the treaty of Tientsin, and made further sacrifices, including the cession of the Kowloon peninsula to Britain.

Success in these battles was not crassly attributed to the permanent superiority of the British.

The British victories were recognised at the time as being due rather to the current superiority of British culture for purposes of conquest and government. Failures of British culture in other respects were acknowledged. Shame was felt and expressed by their officers when the European troops behaved badly. Elgin wrote in his diary:

Can I do anything to prevent England from calling down on herself God’s curse for brutalities committed on another feeble Oriental race? Or [are] all my exertions to result in the extension of the area over which Englishmen are to exhibit how hollow and superficial are both their civilisation and their Christianity?’¹⁴

The Chinese were admired as enemies and for their civic virtues in their own country. Recalling his experiences of the Third China War, Garnett Wolseley (who became the British Army’s Commander in Chief in 1895) wrote that the Chinese were not simply good soldiers and sailors. He had always thought and still believed them to be ‘the great coming rulers of the world’. He had long selected them, he said, ‘as the combatants on one side at the last great battle of Armageddon, the people of the United States of America being their opponents’.¹⁵

The technology of the new ironclad steam ships and the new Armstrong artillery from the workshops of the Tyne would soon and easily be available to many other societies. The good or evil uses to which they would be put, and with what success, would once more depend upon cultural values: the courage of British troops, and the skill with which they were organised and, at home, the capacity of British civilians in terms of their technical competence, and their motivation in terms of purpose, to produce the material and cultural wherewithal of a thriving society.

The young Heihachiro Togo recognised this. He came to England to study British naval technology, the culture of the Royal Navy and the national culture that sustained it. Arriving in England in 1871 and returning to Japan in 1878, he was Japan’s most fervent Anglophile. With ships built on the Tyne, he constructed the Japanese fleet on the model of

the Royal Navy. He then shook the European world by wiping out Russia's Second Pacific Fleet under Vice-Admiral Rozhdestvenski at the Battle of Tsushima in 1905.

All these cultural matters were given vivid expression in connection with an incident that occurred at the Second Battle of the Taku forts. Like the sad case of Kenneth Bigley during the occupation of Iraq that succeeded the Second Iraq War in 2004, this incident was one in which a British subject was beheaded by the enemy.

But the pitiable plight of Kenneth Bigley was the occasion for national compassion. No one suggested that he behaved differently from the way in which you or I would behave in the same

circumstances. He pleaded for his life. He dissociated himself from his British citizenship by appealing to his connections with the Irish Republic. He had spent many years of his life in employment abroad, and if he had been released he had meant to live in Thailand with his Thai wife. His brother, another expatriate, denounced the British government more fiercely than he denounced his brother's kidnappers (and was rewarded with an invitation to express his views to the Labour party conference).

None of these things is reprehensible. But none of them is the material for the bestowal of national honour. They are material for the outpouring of national pity, just as the three minutes' silence for the victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 was a nation-wide expression of fellow-feeling for the passive

victims of a natural disaster. Those three minutes of pity were quite different from the two minutes of honour on Armistice Day, when gratitude is expressed, by those old enough to remember, for the lives sacrificed by relatives, neighbours, old school friends or fellow-townsmen, who knowingly faced the dangers of the sea, or fought as airmen or soldiers, in the defence of their country's way of life.

The man who was beheaded at the Taku forts was also not English. He was a Scotsman whose family

had moved to Kent, where he had joined the 3rd (East Kent) Regiment of Foot (the Buffs). The ballad that was written about him was sometimes called 'The Scottish Soldier'.

On 12 August 1860, a few days before the storming of the forts, two

British soldiers were captured by Manchu cavalry. One was a sergeant with the 44th Regiment of Foot. The other was this Scotsman, Private John Moyses. The sergeant was released, but reported that John Moyses had been beheaded because he had refused to kow-tow to his captors.

Doubt about Moyses's heroism is what is emphasised now. As an article in the *New Left Review* recently commented, there is today 'considerable scepticism about the veracity of the incident'. No cogent grounds are indicated for this 'considerable scepticism', in 2004, about an event in 1860, which was reported to have taken place by the man who was a witness to it.¹⁶ The same article throws doubt on the validity of the awards for valour in the assault on the Taku forts, where no fewer than six Victoria Crosses were won. The article hints that these Victoria Crosses played the same role in real life as Yossarian's decoration played in fiction.¹⁷



Battle During the Opium Wars

British honour had been tarnished by the Taku Repulse. It was now publicly restored. To that end, the storming of the fort was accompanied by the award of no less than six Victoria Crosses.¹⁸

Be that as it may, from the point of view of this article it is the part that the event, invented or true, exaggerated or not, myth or reality, played in reinforcing English values of fortitude, fidelity and self-sacrifice for the common cause that is significant.

Sir Francis Hastings Doyle was Professor of Poetry at Oxford University 1867-77. Soon after the story of Private Moyses's conduct and fate appeared in *The Times* he wrote this poem:

*Last night, among his fellow roughs,
He jested, quaffed and swore;
A drunken private of the Buffs,
Who never looked before.*

*To-day, beneath the foeman's frown,
He stands in Elgin's place
Ambassador from Britain's crown,
And type of all her race.*

*Poor, reckless, rude, low-born,
untaught,
Bewildered, and alone,
A heart, with English instinct
fraught,
He yet can call his own.*

*Ay, tear his body limb from limb,
Bring cord or axe or flame,
He only knows that not through him
Shall England come to shame.*

*Far Kentish hop-fields round him seemed,
Like dreams, to come and go;
Bright leagues of cherry-blossom gleamed,
One sheet of living snow;*

*The smoke above his father's door
In grey soft eddyings hung;
Must he then watch it rise no more,
Doomed by himself so young?*

And thus, with eyes that would not shrink,

*With knee to man unbent,
Unfaltering on its dreadful brink,
To his red grave he went.*

*Vain mightiest fleets of iron framed,
Vain those all-shattering guns,
Unless proud England keep untamed
The strong heart of her sons;*

*So let his name through Europe ring,
A man of mean estate,
Who died, as firm as Sparta's king,
Because his soul was great.*



The Eighth Earl of Elgin

It was one of the poems in *A Book of Ballads*, produced in 1904 for the Board of Education's four-year English syllabus. It was recommended that after the teacher had gone through the poem the pupils should put in their own words what their thoughts were about it. The whole class should then learn it by heart.

In the mid-1920s an arts journal ran a top-of-the-pops of school poetry. Ten thousand children from every type of school chose their own favourite poem. The most popular ones were published in *Poems Chosen by Boys and Girls*.¹⁹ One of them was 'The Private of the Buffs'.

Another was 'Horatius': 'How can man die better than facing fearful odds,/For the ashes

of his fathers,/And the temples of his gods?' Others were 'Drake's Drum', 'Vitai Lampada', 'The Burial of Sir John Moore', and 'Say Not the Struggle Naught Availeth' (the last used with great effect, because it was familiar to so many of his listeners, by Churchill in April 1941 in one of his BBC wartime broadcasts).

I remember learning 'The Private of the Buffs' by heart with the rest of the class in my junior elementary school round about the year 1938, presumably from the 9th impression of *A Book of Ballads* issued in 1936. We never saw the book. Our work materials were slates and slate pencils.

We also learned other poems in praise of selfless heroism, like 'The Wreck of the Birkenhead' (which was also written by Sir Francis Hastings Doyle). It tells of the loss of a troopship, I think in 1852, within a few hundred yards of the South African coast. The troops remained in good order on deck while the lifeboats made return trips for the women and children. Only when the women and children were safe did the soldiers try to swim ashore through the shark-infested waters.

The view that cultural values lie at the heart of a society's success or failure in peace or war is as old as literature itself. But Thomas Carlyle's formulation is striking: 'The poor swearing soldier, hired to be shot, has his "honour", different from the drill regulations and the shilling a day. It is not to taste sweet things, but to do noble and true things, and vindicate himself under God's Heaven as a god-made man, that the poorest son of Adam dimly longs.'²⁰ Poignantly, perhaps, in the light of present tensions, he wrote this in praise of Mahomet and Islam. It was safe to do so, he said, because the clarity, definiteness and strength of English culture when he was writing meant that it stood under no threat from any other.

Notes

¹ Wakeman, F., 'The Canton trade and the Opium War', in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 10, part I, Cambridge: CUP, 1992, p. 172.

² Wong, J. Y., *Deadly Dreams: Opium and the Arrow War (1856–1860)* in China, Cambridge: CUP, 1998.

³ 'Perspectives on the history of psychoactive substance use: opiates Britain 1800-1917', Research Issues 24, Washington D.C.: National Institute on Drug Abuse, p. 155.

⁴ Marx, K., 'Free trade and monopoly', *New York Daily Tribune*, 25 September 1848.

⁵ Hurd, D., *The Arrow War (1856-1860): an Anglo-Chinese Confusion*, London: Collins, 1967.

⁶ Newsinger, J., 'Elgin in China', *New Left Review*, 15, May-June 2002. The definitive anti-British version is to be found in detail in Marx, K., 'The case of the lorcha Arrow', *New York Daily Tribune*, 23 January 1857—the result that a study of the case must 'produce upon every impartial mind' Marx wrote, 'is that the British are in the wrong in the whole proceeding'.

⁷ Fairbank, J. K., *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports 1842-54*, Cambridge, Mass., HUP, p. 380.

⁸ Waley, A. D., *The Opium War through Chinese Eyes*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1958.

⁹ Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, p. 231.

¹⁰ Bruce, J., *Letters and Journals of James, Eighth Earl of Elgin*, Walrond, T. (ed.), London: 1872, p. 212.

¹¹ Oliphant, L., *Narrative of the Earl of Elgin's Mission to China and Japan (1861)*, London: OUP, 1970, p. 130.

¹² Newsinger, J., p. 130. Bruce, *Letters and Journals*, 1872, p. 220, pp. 224-25.

¹³ Marx, K., 'The new Chinese war', *New York Daily Tribune*, 18 October 1859.

¹⁴ Newsinger, J., p. 134. Bruce, *Letters and Journals*, 1872, p. 325.

¹⁵ Wolseley, G. J., *The Story of a Soldier's Life*, London: Constable, 1903, p. 2.

¹⁶ Garnett Wolseley, who was to become the Army's Commander in Chief in later years, noted that the sergeant, because of the effects of his experience could not, or because he had something to conceal would not, give any 'connected account' of what had happened. Wolseley, G. J., *Narrative of the War with China in 1860*, London: Longman, Green and Roberts, 1862, p. 112.

¹⁷ Heller, J., *Catch-22*, London: Cape, 1962. Yossarian is blamed for the loss of Kraft's plane in a failed mission to bomb Ferrara. To make sure that the mission will be counted a success that no one will dare question, Colonels Cathcart and Korn arrange for Yossarian to be awarded a medal for bravery.

¹⁸ Newsinger, J., 'Elgin in China', *New Left Review*, 15, May-June 2002, p. 135. (Emphasis added.)

¹⁹ Wright, F. and Rhodes, C., *Poems Chosen by Boys and Girls*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1925.

²⁰ Carlyle, T., 'The hero as prophet: Mahomet', *On Heroes and Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History* (May 1840), London: Chapman and Hall, 1890, pp. 64-65.

Why Hiding Sikh is No Longer at Play

David Conway

It was difficult to be jolly last Christmas, when, with every passing day of that normally joyous season, some new nail seemed being driven into the coffin of England's traditional liberties.



Prof. David Conway

One especially depressing incident to have occurred at this time was the forced early closure on December 20th of the play, 'Behzti' by Sikh playwright, Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, which had previously been playing to full houses at a Birmingham theatre. Its author was also forced into hiding on the advice of the police in the face of threats to her life from those irate with her play.

What had so offended the playwright's co-religionists was her play's depiction of rape and murder occurring in a Sikh temple or Gurdwara.

Leaders of the Birmingham Sikh community were quick to dissociate themselves from the violent protests, yet still found the play and its staging objectionable.

Leaders of the Birmingham Sikh community were quick to dissociate themselves from the violent protests, yet still found the play and its staging objectionable.

'In a Sikh temple sexual abuse does not take place. Kissing and dancing don't take place, rape doesn't take place, homosexual activity doesn't take place, murders do not take place', so was the chairman of the Sikh Gurdwaras in Birmingham reported to have said in justification of the protests at the play.

His sentiments were echoed by a former co-chairman of the same organisation who was reported as having said, 'Of course I condemn violence wherever it occurs and we are a peaceful and law-abiding community. But you should also consider who is provoking this violence – who is creating this anger but the author herself... If this was set in a church or a mosque or any other place of worship there would be the same strong feelings.'

Mercifully, we were spared the sight of British Muslims out in the streets protesting at the sentence that was passed at the same time as the play was forced to shut on a British imam who had been convicted of

raping a twelve year old girl in his Bristol mosque while supposedly giving her religious instruction.

If Sikhs could consider justified protests against a play that depicted something they considered could not possibly occur in one of their places of worship, why, one wonders, did their example not embolden British Muslims to stage similar protests against a verdict which convicted one of their religious leaders of having performed such an act in one of theirs?

The absence of such protests suggests British Muslims were reluctantly forced to concede that such events could take place. If they were able to, why cannot and should not all religious groups have to concede such events capable of happening in their own places of worship? If so, then dramatised depictions of such incidents in their places of worship should have to be tolerated by all denominations, however distasteful to contemplate.

Even if it were inconceivable any such form of depravity could possibly occur in a Sikh temple, it is difficult to believe the claims of some Birmingham Sikh leaders in support of the early closure of the play that its fictitious de-piction of such incidents in one of their temples merited protest because it would be liable to bring their community into disrepute in the eyes of the public. Surely, if anything was likely to, it would only be resort to muscle on the part of some of their community in forcing such a play off the stage.

What makes the sorry tale so depressing is what it presages for the future of liberty in this country and elsewhere, that intolerant minorities are allowed by the authorities to impose their will on others by resort to the use and threat of force. Once any group, be it a minority or majority, receives license so to do, it marks the



beginning of the end of the rule of law, and the start of intolerant mob rule.

Some consolation, perhaps, can be gained by recalling how past attempts to use force to suppress novel ways of thinking, in the long run, have had a habit of grossly back-firing. One has only to think of Socrates, not to mention that figure whose birth is celebrated by his numerous followers at the time the play was forced to close.

However, recollection of this fact can provide little cause for comfort in the short- to medium-term when it seems all too likely that a climate of religious intolerance will continue to heighten in face of the apparent unwillingness or inability of the political authorities to face it down.

Little did those in authority in the `Eighties who were willing to turn a deaf ear to the calls of British Muslims for the death of Salman Rushdie realise where their pusillanimity would end the world up some twenty years later.

If the authorities are unwilling at this time to make a stand on behalf of the freedom of expression of all their citizens in face of religious intolerance, who knows what it will presage for us all twenty years hence?

The writing is on the wall, if, sadly, at this time no longer on the stage.

Class Wars

Anastasia de Waal



Anastasia de Waal

Here's a paradox: private education is no longer immune from state control. Following the 2002 Education Act, which gave OfSTED the power to assess private schools, the inspectorate has severely curtailed the freedoms of schools that should not logically fall within its remit. In March 2004, OfSTED assessed Charterhouse Square School, a £7000-a-year day school in the Barbican. Despite the school's attainment of above-average results in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 SATs (government-set tests for 7 and 11 year olds), and a consistent record of feeding large numbers of pupils into top secondary schools, OfSTED declared the school substandard. Which raises the question: was this the result of direct vindictiveness on the part of the state or merely of systemic weaknesses within contemporary audit culture?

Whilst Civitas' interest in the state's relationship with the private sector was generated by OfSTED reporting on Charterhouse Square, the focus soon widened to a consideration of the government's education agenda as a whole. As the evidence gathered, it became increasingly clear that Charterhouse Square's experiences, far from being unique, reflected the acute politicisation of the

Blairite education project. It is no surprise that education should echo the political standpoint of the party in power; but there is no precedent for the degree to which schools have become ideologically and politically susceptible. Despite formal freedoms, justified on the grounds that it is not a beneficiary of government funding, ostensibly harmless audit mechanisms are threatening the independence of the private sector. Sneaking through the back door of health and safety-related regulations, Whitehall doctrines are permeating the curriculum structure and teaching methods. At first glance, the aim of these regulations is to ensure that the private school provides a 'satisfactory' standard of education, care and accommodation for pupils - a reasonable requirement. However, the regulations run far deeper, since what counts as 'satisfactory' is prescribed in fastidious detail. An example of the level of dictation by OfSTED was recently witnessed at a top London prep school. The head teacher had equipped classrooms with adjoining chairs and tables, in a clever attempt to combat the routine disturbance caused by pupils tucking in their chairs. Yet OfSTED's inflexible stipulations deemed this arrangement unacceptable. Thus, at enormous expense, the school was forced to invest, in new furniture.

Furthermore - and this has ramifications for all educational provision - the dynamics of the audit system in education are fundamentally defective. The current system of inspection is encouraging a discourse of fabrication, as

teachers attempt to give the impression of compliance in order to achieve favourable inspection reports. Hence not only are the liberties of private education being sabotaged, but independent schools are also finding themselves subject to a worthless, even detrimental, accountability charade. OfSTED appears to be no more than an innocuous auditor. Thus opposition to the reorganisation required by the inspectorate is weakened by benign labels such as transparency - *on top* of every school's fear of receiving bad publicity as a result of its OfSTED inspection.

How and why has education, state and private, become so politically implicated under New Labour? In principle, investment in schooling is a long-sighted strategy, with potential impact not only on the quality of schooling but also crime levels and economic prosperity: to reform education is to reform society at large. More cynically however, unlike reform of the NHS, employment laws or the penal code, the direct impact of educational reform is not immediately quantifiable, the successes more opaque.

Fiscally, politically and ideologically, this government has invested more in education than any other government in British history. Therefore it is imperative for the Blair administration that this investment delivers electorally tangible returns. New Labour's ideological focus on education could be described as germinating a 'democratic project'. Providing an excellent education for the workforce of tomorrow will not only create a more financially independent and egalitarian society, but also aid the Blairite vision of Britain as an economic super-power. Consequently, when independent schools persistently outstrip the state sector in tests specifically designed to measure the successes of the National Curriculum, it is an embarrassing indictment of the education system and, more importantly, the promises of the party in power.

Within New Labour's democratic project, the strain of egalitarianism championed by the party equates essentially with anti-elitism. Whilst the government argues that anti-elitism is simply an assertion of democracy, it is equally viable to argue that it is an encroachment on democracy. Disallowing those in the private sector to flourish, through the illegitimate imposition of regulation on private schools, effectively acts to improve the public perception of state

education. Thus the private sector finds itself penalised on the grounds of its successes, as high achievement is perverted into symbolising old-fashioned educational snobbery and attributed to narrowed curricula and antiquated methodologies, rather than good teaching. Such a form of enforced egalitarianism can only act to erode the very foundations of a merit-based democracy, as well as drive educational standards down to the lowest common denominator.

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The New Model School Project

Seamus Heffernan

When you work on a project whose long-term ambition is to effect major change within the educational system, it can be very easy to lose sight of the short-term rewards. However, less than a year since the New Model School Company opened its first independent school, and barely a month into a term of our Saturday school in East London, the true rewards—the happiness and progress of our pupils—are already apparent.

At Maple Walk, our school in northwest London, the end of the Winter Term saw our headteacher, Lavinia Southam, return home to the United States. We are delighted that our new head, Sarah Knollys, has shown the same enthusiasm and commitment to the school and its pupils as Lavinia. Our current parents, and the many prospective parents who have met with her, are just as pleased as we are. However, it is our pupils' progress that matters most, and all signs suggest that they continue to do very well as we get closer to the end of what, so far, has been an exciting and successful first year for all of us.



Pupils at the Maple Walk School enjoy the multi-sensory room at the Moberly Centre



Mrs Ko teaching pupils at the Sanaton Saturday School

We also have good news about our location. In April, just in time for the Summer Term, we will be relocating from the Moberly Centre on Kilburn Lane to our new home, the first floor of the parish hall at Our Lady of the Holy Souls Church on Bosworth Road, W10. The move will allow us to accommodate what will be a much larger number of pupils next year, and we look forward to taking advantage of both the extra space and the wonderful play facilities just across the road. We are, of course, indebted to the Diocese of Westminster and Our Lady's parish priest, Fr Sean O'Toole, for their support and co-operation.

In addition to our work at Maple Walk, Civitas' Saturday morning classes at Toynbee Hall have been a huge success. Coming together with the Sanaton Association, a commu-

nity group for Hindu Bangladeshis, we are offering academic support for families who have a tremendous dedication to the education of their children. According to our teachers, Mrs Linda Webb and Mrs Mimi Ko, the pupils are making great strides in both their literacy and numeracy skills. However, in addition to the 3 Rs, the children are also learning public speaking and debating skills. When asked to comment on the students' progress, Mrs Webb said: 'We're trying to get their confidence up, and some of them have really come out of their shell. They enjoy it. They always ask, "Can we have our debate today?"' The feedback we have been getting from the parents suggests that they are just as pleased as the children.



Two young pupils improve their literacy skills at the Sanaton Saturday School