

Off The Cuff

EVERY MONDAY

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The Virtues of George W. Bush

GEORGE W. BUSH has many virtues, but wisdom is not one of them. A wise ruler would not have disbanded the Iraqi army leaving tens of thousands of well-armed young Iraqi men without occupations or pay cheques. A wise ruler would not fall out with most of his allies simultaneously . . . disagreements with one or two at a time might be more sensible. And, a wise ruler would not poke a stick into a hornet's nest and not expect to get stung. A wise ruler would not offer NATO membership to Georgia without taking concrete steps in anticipation of the Russian response.

Machiavelli made the point well: "The Romans did what every wise prince must do: They kept their eyes trained not only on present problems but also future ones, which must be anticipated with great care, because when one sees these problems approaching they can still be remedied, whereas if one waits for them to arrive it will be too late to administer medicine. The illness will have become incurable."

I think I can say, without fear of widespread hoots and guffaws that anticipating problems has not been George's strong suit. Yet, it does seem a little unfair to blame him for the Russian invasion of Georgia.

However, this is precisely what Lindsey German, the *Stopper-of-Wars-in-Chief*, did in the latest edition of *Socialist Worker*. "This is

not just a 'little local difficulty' between Russia and Georgia. It is part of a drive to war across the globe that has characterised the eight years of George Bush's US presidency."

She takes a swipe at Putin who she characterises as "the butcher of Chechnya", but Bush, and the West's insatiable thirst for oil, is the villain of the piece.

This *barmy*, visceral, anti-Americanism has many different manifestations. It has often led *radical popular democrats* in the West to sink their differences with Jihadists, Ayatollahs, and the *corporate states* of authoritarian rulers from Havana to Khartoum, and from Beijing to Moscow. Anything that these corporate states do to oppose America and the other democratic powers' evil designs upon the world is justified as being in the broader interests of peace and the oppressed.

On the rare occasions when radical popular democrats in the West cannot justify the actions of anti-American strongmen, the crimes they commit are by elaborate and circuitous routes, laid ingeniously at the door of the Whitehouse and the Pentagon.

For example, Mark Almond, of *The Guardian* and Oriel College, Oxford, was moved to compare South Ossetia to the *Mahvinas*, and Georgian leader, Mikhail Saakashvili, to Argentina's General Leopoldo Galtieri in an elaborate attempt to shift responsibility from Moscow to Tbilisi. Incidentally, Mark is at pains to point out that the main road to Tbilisi's airport is called: George W. Bush Avenue.

These, almost instinctive moves on the part of radical popular democrats in the West to oppose the actions of their own democratic governments at almost every turn appears, paradoxically, to be rooted in a pathological hatred of the democratic states in which they live. They are at pains to dismiss the democracy

and the numerous institutions of the robust civil societies in which they live as, in some fundamental sense, *fraudulent*. It leads these opponents of British or American or European democracy automatically to discover similarities and equivalences in the actions of NATO members with a seemingly endless list of strongmen from Pyongyang to Harare.

These radical popular democrats, broadly speaking, the left-wing of many Western societies, appear to have become ensnared by a form of cynicism or *political realism* in which the ruthless violence of democratic states are held to be examples of *real politique* shorn of all ethical or moral ambition for a fairer or more stable world. Consequently, the military actions of democratic states are held to be broadly equivalent to those of authoritarian corporate states, with the signal difference, that the corporate states are held to be, *objectively*; on the side of the oppressed, while the NATO powers routinely put profits *before* people, and oil *before* blood.

These left-wingers heartily agree with Vladimir Putin when he said last week: "What is surprising is not the cynicism. Politics is, after all, cynical by definition. What is surprising is the scale of the cynicism."

Putin was responding to Western attacks upon Russia's invasion of Georgia. He went on to remind us that "Saddam Hussein had to be hanged for destroying a few villages", yet the Georgian leaders are allowed to get away with murder. Putin went further, reminding us of President Reagan's perfidy when he said of the Nicaraguan dictator, Anastasio Somoza Debayle: "Somoza may be a scoundrel, but he's *our* scoundrel."

Clearly Putin, like his apologists on the left, believes that there is no difference in the actions of states that use violence and repression in

pursuit of their foreign policy goals. He, like his left-wing apologists, cannot see the difference between American actions in Iraq and his own actions in Chechnya and Georgia; he can see no difference between the actions of Omar Bashir in Darfur and the NATO operation in Afghanistan.

According to this view of the world, the goals of the Western democracies and the corporate states are *all of a piece*. The aspiration for defensible private property, the rule of law, active civil society, free elections and freedom of speech are so much window dressing. All the West and NATO members are interested in is oil and profits and the realistic pursuit of their own state interests.

The idea that Western democratic leaders *actually do believe that only the defence of private property and the rule of law* offer the oppressed and war weary the prospect of peace and prosperity is given short shrift by those on the left. They agree with Putin, Western democracy is *a put up job*; it is essentially fraudulent. Vladimir Lenin's view of British democratic institutions as merely "a cloak for bourgeois dictatorship" meets with hearty approval.

It is a bleak view of the world in which bundles of cynical observations are paradoxically bound together by utopian aspirations for peace and freedom, equality and sustainable communities. This outlook is the product of an anti-capitalist left in profound crisis; a left-wing politics for which the only answer to private property, profits, and capitalist development, is the state ownership and centralised control of economic life.

These are the only grounds that the left has for engaging in elaborate apologetics for the emerging corporate states. Despite, their evident misgivings about goings-on in places as diverse

as Tehran and Naypyidaw, those on the radical left in Britain, in Europe, and in the United States, spontaneously side with governments which, when faced with capitalist development, seek to control it by the institution of a corporate

state in which democracy is denied in the interests of centralisation, national independence and a pretended social harmony.

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