

Tony Blair's forgotten victims

A familiar, if desperate media push is under way to convince the British people that the main political parties offer them a democratic choice in the general election on 5 May. This demonstrable absurdity became hilarious when Tony Blair, leader of one of the nastiest, most violent right-wing regimes in memory, announced the existence of “a very nasty right-wing campaign” to defeat him. If only it was that funny. If only it was possible to read the “ah, but” tributes to a “successful” Labour government without cracking a rib. If only it was possible to read warmongers bemoaning the “apathy” of the British electorate without one’s laughter being overtaken by the urge to throw up.

Truth can be subverted, but for millions of decent Britons the subversion is over, and the penny has finally dropped. For that, they have Blair to thank. On 5 May, they will silently go on strike against a corrupt, undemocratic system, as they did at the last election, producing the lowest turnout since the franchise, including barely a third in some constituencies. Others will come under extraordinary pressure to put aside considerations of basic morality and vote for this “successful” Blair government. They – allow me to change that to *you* – ought to be aware of what this will mean for your fellow human beings.

By voting for Blair, you will walk over the corpses of at least 100,000 people, most of them innocent women and children and the elderly, slaughtered by rapacious forces sent by Blair and Bush, unprovoked and in defiance of international law, to a defenceless country. That conservative estimate is the conclusion of a peer-reviewed Anglo-American study, published in the British medical journal the *Lancet*. It is the most reliable glimpse we have of the criminal carnage caused by Blair and Bush in Iraq, and it is suppressed in this election “campaign”.

By voting for Blair, you will be turning a deaf ear to the cries of countless Iraqi children blown up by British cluster bombs and poisoned by toxic explosions of depleted uranium. These unseen victims of Blair and Bush – including Iraqi

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women who have developed rare “pregnancy cancer”, and children with unexplained leukaemia – will not be your concern. According to one of the military experts who cleaned up Kuwait after the 1991 Gulf war, Blair and Bush have created “another Hiroshima” in parts of Iraq. You will be voting to endorse that.

By voting for Blair, you will turn away from the tens of thousands of children left to starve in Iraq by his and Bush’s invasion. On 30 March, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights heard that malnutrition rates among Iraqi infants under the age of five had almost doubled since the invasion – double the number of hungry children under Saddam Hussein. The author of the report to the commission, Jean Ziegler, a UN specialist on hunger, said the “coalition” was to blame.

By voting for Blair, you will be affirming that liars triumph. Blair is a liar on such an epic scale that even those who still protect him with parliamentary euphemisms, like Robin Cook (“He knew perfectly well what he was doing. I think there was a lack of candour”) and the Guardian and the BBC, now struggle to finesse his perjury.

Take his latest lie. On 13 March, Jonathan Dimbleby asked Blair about the leaked memo of David Manning, the Prime Minister’s foreign policy adviser, in which Manning confirmed to Blair in March 2002 that he had assured the Americans “you would not budge in your support for regime change”. Blair lied to Dimbleby that “actually he didn’t say that as a matter of fact”: Manning “[made] clear that the development of WMDs in breach of the United Nations resolutions will no longer be tolerated”.

Following are the words Manning wrote to Blair: “I said [to Condoleezza Rice] that you would not budge in your support for regime change but you had to manage a press, a Parliament and a public opinion that was very different [from] anything in the States.” There is no mention, nothing, about United Nations resolutions, or weapons of mass destruction.

By voting for Blair, you will invite more lies about terrorist scares in Britain so that totalitarian laws can be enacted. “I have a horrible feeling that we are sinking into a police state,” said George Churchill-Coleman, the former head of Scotland Yard’s anti-terrorist squad. Like the fake reasons for Blair’s tanks around Heathrow on the eve of the greatest anti-war demonstration in British history, so anything, any scare, any arrest, any “control order”, will be possible.

By voting for Blair, you will fall for the spin, the myth, of the social reformism and “economic achievements” of his government. The ban on fox-hunting and the

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lowering of the age of gay consent are political and media distractions that do nothing to protect a social democracy being progressively shorn of ancient liberties, such as those enshrined in Magna Carta.

The ballyhooed “boom” and “growth” in Britain have been booms for the rich, not for ordinary people. With scant media attention, the Blair government has transferred billions of pounds’ worth of public services into private hands under the private finance initiative (PFI). The “fees”, or rake-off, for PFI projects in 2006-2007 will be in the order of £6.3bn, more than the cost of many of the projects: a historic act of corporate piracy. Neither is new Labour “supporting” the National Health Service, but privatising it by stealth; by 2006-2007 private contracts will rise by 150 per cent. Under Gordon Brown, Britain has the distinction of having created more than half the world’s tax havens, so that the likes of Rupert Murdoch are able to pay minimal tax. “Growth” has meant the rapid growth in the gap between rich and poor. Top executives’ pay has risen by 500 per cent while the average rise in earnings is 45 per cent.

Contrary to Blair’s and Brown’s claims, poverty among adults of working age without children is increasing. In 2002-2003, the last year for which figures are available, 12.4 million people, or 22 per cent of the population, were living in poverty. As for the myth of almost full employment, this government’s skill at constantly massaging figures has, for example, allowed jobcentres to reclassify workers as long-term sick or disabled in order to meet targets for “reducing” unemployment. There has indeed been a boom – in insecure, part-time and temporary employment with few rights and poor conditions. Trapped in this half-world are some 8.8 million workers, many of whom are lucky to get a couple of days’ paid work a week. For middle-class Britons who believe they are beneficiaries of the “boom”, there is the spectre of personal debt – which, under Labour, is rising at the rate of £15m an hour, faster than even in America.

Little of this is up for discussion. In 2005, we have an election, not politics; a media court, not critical debate. True politics is about all of humanity, and our responsibility for those who commit crimes in our name. No reverence for the sanctity of a debased vote or a false choice – or the lesser evil of a non-existent, sentimental, pre-Blair party – will change that. We owe that truth to the people of Iraq, at least.

*John Pilger’s film *Stealing a Nation*, about the expulsion of the people of Diego Garcia, has won the Royal Television Society’s award for best documentary on British television in 2004-2005*