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Review

Rough Music

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Tariq Ali's new short (100 pages) polemical book against New Labour is a must for every socialist. The book was written over the summer, so it is up to date with analysis on the "July days", the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes, and the attacks on civil liberties.

The actions and words of Blair in his un-ending war against terrorism are scrutinised with a forensic approach, and the hypocrisy the prime minister is laid bare with acerbic wit.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/tariqali.jpg>]

Probably the most interesting part of the book is the description of the unfolding coup by Blair and Campbell against Greg Dyke and the BBC. If virtually all the newspapers supported uncritically Blair's drive for war, the BBC felt it had to follow the unfolding events through the prism of parliamentary politics and divisions in Parliament.

Although Dyke was an enthusiastic Blairite when appointed, "the price of truth had become prohibitive". Tariq writes that "Campbell rang Dyke after the February 15 demonstration to denounce the BBC for accepting that there were a million people out on the streets" and that there was anger at the composition of Question Time panels.

The successful coup against the BBC means virtually the whole media is a mouthpiece for the government. Although the ownership of the media is independent, its relationship with the government is no better than that owned by Berlusconi in Italy.

The crisis in representation in Britain is commonly accepted on the left in Britain, with the two last general elections having the lowest turn-out in history. But the slavish support for US foreign policy with a fig-leaf of parliamentary democracy topped by the Queen, brings Tariq to describe Britain as being no more than a "banana monarchy".

This image is close to the truth when we remember that Harold Wilson, also an supporter the "special relationship" with the USA, chose that Britain would not be involved in the Vietnam quagmire. Now Iraq seems to be an even greater political crisis on both sides of the Atlantic than foreseen.

Tariq reminds us that Blair's embracing of neo-liberalism in both the economic and military field dates back a long way. Blair obtained the then Labour Shadow Cabinet unanimous support to Major's and Clinton's air strikes on Iraq. Tariq also quotes Nigel Lawson from a year before the Tory defeat that "Mrs Thatcher's true successor is currently Leader of the Opposition".

The transformation of the Labour into "party who programme was virtually undistinguishable from the Conservatives - and in some respects worse than that of the Major government" and with a PLP that "has, with few exceptions, swallowed every bitter and nauseous pill" from Blair leads to one of the central conclusions of the book that we "need a political movement ... to the left of New Labour built on the best of the socialist and radical traditions.

Tariq's arguments for a "political party that speaks for the poor and underprivileged" are welcome and so is his recent presence on Respect platforms.

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