

Blair Won't Escape Nemesis on Iraq, Economy

by Mark and Mary Burdman

The last week of January was one of the most politically fraught and dramatic weeks in modern British political history, and a decisive one for British Prime Minister Tony Blair. On Jan. 27, his government barely squeaked through a House of Commons vote on his pet project of having universities impose “top-up fees”—added tuition fees—on students. The next day, Law Lord Hutton gave his long-awaited report on the death, on July 17, 2003, of top British weapons scientist Dr. David Kelly. Hutton exonerated Blair's government of all blame for the circumstances leading to Kelly's death.

Hutton further exonerated the government of charges made last Spring by BBC defense correspondent Andrew Gilligan, that the government had intervened to “sex up” its September 2002 intelligence dossier on Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction,” so as to make the “Iraqi threat” seem immediate and mortal to Britons. Hutton put the entire burden of guilt for Kelly's death, which he ruled a suicide, onto the BBC, for allowing Gilligan to broadcast. Within 24 hours after the report, BBC chairman Gavin Davies and Director General Greg Dyke had both resigned. By the afternoon of Jan. 28, Blair was going into overdrive, demanding apologies from all his opponents for any and all assertions that his government had engaged in deception.

The Word ‘Whitewash’ Is Heard

But Blair's seeming victories are, at best, Pyrrhic. However smug 10 Downing Street might be for the moment, the Furies will have their way. There are two essential historical realities in Britain today, and they cannot long be ignored. One, is that the economy is hopelessly bankrupt, with the population massively in debt and a real estate bubble that could pop at any time. The second, is that Britain was brought into an unending war in Iraq on false premises: namely, that Saddam Hussein was an immediate and mortal threat to the British Isles, capable of deploying weapons of mass destruction, as the 2002 Iraq Dossier claimed, “within 45 minutes.”

The WMD hoax is being exposed, day by day, also because of the exposure in the United States of the intelligence frauds perpetrated by Vice President Dick Cheney and his gang. Polls in Britain show that almost one-half the British population believe that Blair lied to get Britain into the war.

The day after the Hutton Report, headlines in almost every British paper, from the tabloids to the “establishment” press, focussed on the real issue: “We've had Hutton. Now, where are the weapons of mass destruction?” Lord Hutton's legalist

approach cannot change that reality. He went so far in defending the government from all blame, that his exoneration of Blair is backfiring. Most damaging to his credibility, is that he ignored evidence presented during his own inquiry, including from Blair's own Chief of Staff Jonathan Powell, that the government had, indeed, "sexed up" its September 2002 dossier. Hutton stretched the matter to such an extent, that he had to make the absurd admission: "The possibility cannot be completely ruled out, that the desire of the Prime Minister to have a dossier which . . . was as strong as possible in relation to the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's WMD, may have *subconsciously*" influenced the intelligence community to strengthen the wording of the dossier.

As London *Guardian* commentator Seamus Milne wrote Jan. 29, Hutton's "unqualified endorsement of the government's behavior is bound, in the current climate, to be widely regarded in the country as a cover-up." Indeed, the word "whitewash" is heard throughout the country. One leading strategist commented to *EIR* Jan. 29: "This report is beyond a whitewash. It is outrageous, I can barely contain my anger."

Lord Hutton had to admit that he took the "narrow" interpretation of his task. On the issue which got Britain into war, especially Saddam Hussein's supposed "WMD," he concluded that "a question of such wide import, which would involve the consideration of a wide range of evidence, is not one which falls within my terms of reference." In the raucous Parliament debate following his report, both Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy and Conservative Party leader Michael Howard called for a full, independent inquiry on whether Britain went to war on false grounds, with Howard calling the case for such an inquiry "overwhelming." Also, an initiative is being mooted for reviving the impeachment procedure in the House of Commons, against Blair.

British Economy Also a Wreck

The vote on university top-up fees is bringing to the fore the reality of Britain's economic bankruptcy, and its vulnerability to the ongoing shocks in the international financial system. This is leaving Blair's "New Labour" project, to impose Thatcherite "privatization" measures across the board in Britain—including in vital areas like health and education—dead in the water.

The essence of the top-up fees legislation was to shift the burden of funding higher education away from the state, on to students, who would have to pay the additional money after graduation, when their income reaches £15,000 a year. The reason is, that Britain's universities and its government are hopelessly bankrupt. The Higher Education Bill, which featured this measure, produced ferocious opposition in the Labour Party as well as the opposition. In the end, Blair's margin of victory was only five votes, 316-311, despite the fact that Labour has a 161-vote majority in Parliament. The only reason Blair survived the vote at all, is that he made big concessions to the Labour opposition, and his rival, Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, called on his followers to drop



Blaming Cheney? British Prime Minister Tony Blair's government narrowly survived in Parliament on the economy on Jan. 27; but the Iraq war controversy is reaching the point where Blair's advisors are apparently intending to extricate Blair by pointing the blame at Vice President Dick Cheney.

their opposition to the Bill. Brown, not Blair, was hailed as the "strong man" in the situation; the word "strong" should be tempered by the fact that Brown is presiding over an economy whose debt levels are the subject of regular danger warnings by the Bank of England.

Following the Jan. 27 top-up battle, a City of London insider told *EIR* that "Tony Blair is a dead man walking; he's in office, but he's not in power. The situation has become much too irksome. I think Blair will psychologically crack, and it is likely he will be out by Easter. I sense that his office is already preparing people for his departure." A leading British historian affirmed that "Blair is a wreck, I think soon we will see him pack it in. He looks exhausted, like he's had enough. He can no longer weave his spell, and his attempt to be in charge of everything is collapsing. There's a sense of disillusion with him in this country, and suddenly, the Parliamentary Labour Party has come alive, to have his majority shrink to five." This historian sees Blair going the way of the late Prime

Minister Anthony Eden, who unravelled psychologically after the 1956 Suez War debacle.

No To Pre-emptive War

Meanwhile, the witches are stirring their cauldron. Each day, or almost each hour, witnesses new revelations and disclaimers about Iraqi WMD. Most damaging have been the near-daily statements by David Kay, who on Jan. 23 announced his resignation from his post as top weapons inspector in the American Iraq Survey Group. Long regarded as a “hardliner” on Iraqi WMD, Kay stated that there were no stockpiles of Iraqi WMD. He asserted: “I don’t think they existed. . . . I don’t think there was a large-scale production program in the 1990s.” On Jan. 28, just a few hours after Hutton’s public statement, Kay told the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee: “It turns out we were all wrong, probably, in my judgment, and that is most disturbing.” Kay’s words were widely covered in Britain the next day.

Former Labour Foreign Secretary Robin Cook reacted to Kay’s comments by pointing to the real issue behind the Iraq WMD hype. He insisted that Tony Blair must “concede there were mistakes made. . . . We have got to drop this very dangerous doctrine under which we went to war, of the pre-emptive strike. If there was no threat from Iraq, we obviously had no right to carry out a pre-emptive strike to remove that threat. . . . The reality is that Number 10 [Downing Street] was keen to get into the war.”

A similar evaluation came after a Jan. 22 BBC-Panorama 90-minute television feature, watched by millions in Britain, which elaborated the Blair government efforts to “spin” and skew intelligence in preparing the infamous September 2002 “dodgy dossier.” Ironically, much of the material Panorama presented came from Hutton inquiry testimony—which his lordship chose to ignore. Among much else described, was former media czar Alastair Campbell’s involvement in “spinning” intelligence, and conniving with John Scarlett, head of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) which coordinates intelligence in the Prime Minister’s office; and the late Dr. Kelly expressing the hope that the dossier would end up in the garbage can.

Panorama focussed on the “45 minutes” claim, which led to sensational headlines in tabloids like the *Sun*: “Brits 45 Minutes from Doom”; with the comment that “British servicemen and tourists in Cyprus could be annihilated.” MI6 had based this assessment on hearsay “evidence” from a single source. On Jan. 27, the *Guardian* quoted the source who had passed MI6 this evidence, as now saying it may well have been “a crock of shit.” Nick Theros, the Washington representative of the Iraqi National Alliance exile-group, and Iraqi Governing Council member Iyad Allawi, said: “Clearly, we have not found WMD.” They said the Iraqi officer who claims to have been the original source of the intelligence had, in fact, never seen the purported chemical weapons crates on which the “45 minutes” was based, and

is now said to be “in hiding.”

Panorama also featured comments with Sir Rodric Braithwaite, former British ambassador to Moscow and former head of the JIC, criticizing the behavior of the JIC, for failing its mission to be “objective.”

In a feature entitled “The Emperor Has Been Stripped Naked,” London *Guardian* security affairs editor Richard Norton-Taylor, one of the more reliable experts on such matters in the U.K., asserted on Jan. 24 that Panorama had revealed that “senior Whitehall officials and ministerial advisers are now saying” that British involvement in the invasion of Iraq was “the result of a *gigantic sham*.” The Blair government was intent on aligning itself with Washington’s doctrine of “pre-emptive military invasion,” and had to “rely on the WMD issue,” since “to declare regime change as the objective . . . would be seriously contrary to international law.” A scare over Iraqi WMD would be the only way to win Labour Party parliamentarians and the public for war. Even the *Financial Times* had to wobble on the matter, saying that, in future, pre-emptive wars would have to be “justified” by more than hoked-up intelligence.

These attacks on pre-emptive war are very important. The Blair dossier was released on Sept. 24, 2002, only a few days after the Dick Cheney-inspired doctrine authorizing pre-emptive war was declared to be official American foreign policy, in the new U.S. National Security Strategy.

Blame It on Cheney?

In this charged atmosphere, an option being mooted in certain quarters in London, is that MPs might initiate a House of Commons impeachment proceeding against Blair. This was publicly floated in the *Guardian* on Jan. 28 by Dan Plesch, an outspoken critic of the Iraq war, now at Birkbeck College and formerly at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Plesch argued that impeachment “is an English tradition. . . . It was used for much of the 17th and 18th Centuries”—including against King Charles I, who eventually lost his head. According to Plesch, “Parliament could once again act as a court. . . . MP Peter Kilfoyle recently asked the House of Commons library for a briefing on whether impeachment was still part of the constitution, and was assured that it was. And senior Tory figures have let it be known that they would favour the impeachment of the Prime Minister.”

Normally, there are other methods of redress for grievances in Britain, Plesch wrote, but “in the case of Iraq, there may well be an argument for bringing back impeachment. . . . As many people have pointed out, there needs to be further inquiry into the way the war was sold to the British public, and to Members of Parliament, and into the uses and misuses of intelligence.”

It is an irony that Blair, in his desperation, may be trying one cute trick, in order to save his hide, which will rebound in America. Even though his September 2002 Iraq WMD dossier supported Cheney’s pre-emptive war strategy, Blair’s

entourage is putting out the line that one key person to blame for Blair's problems, is none other than Dick Cheney! This comes in the form of a new biography of Blair, due out the week of Feb. 2, by London *Financial Times* political commentator Philip Stephens. An account was featured as the *Financial Times*'s lead front-page article, and in an accompanying full page on Jan. 26. These revealed that Blair holds Cheney and his Chief of Staff Lewis "Scooter" Libby responsible for sabotaging Blair's policy of getting the United Nations to approve the war on Iraq, so that it would not be solely an Anglo-American adventure.

The *FT* reported: "Mr. Stephens' book reveals how Dick Cheney . . . remained implacably opposed to the [UN-multilateral] strategy throughout. . . . 'He [Cheney] waged a guerilla war against the process. . . . He's a visceral unilateralist,' one Blair aide remarked. 'Cheney fought it all the way—at every twist and turn, even after Bush's speech to the UN,' agreed another."

The book apparently further reveals that Cheney made a string of acid interventions in the course of critical talks between President Bush and the Prime Minister at Camp David, in September 2002. "At one stage, he directly rebuked Alastair Campbell, Mr Blair's director of communications. In occasional contacts with British officials, Scooter Libby, the Vice-President's chief of staff, made little secret of his boss' scorn for multilateralism. 'Oh dear, we'd better not do that,' he once jibed, 'or we might upset the Prime Minister.' "

Stephens wrote that Blair was surprised to find Cheney at Camp David. "Cheney had never disguised his impatience for war, and his scorn for the suggestion that the US needed the blessing of the UN to remove Saddam. 'Once we have victory in Baghdad, all the critics will look like fools,' Cheney told one high-ranking British official during the Summer of 2002. The Vice-President's vision was of a world in which America asserted its primacy through the muscular use of military force." After the Camp David meeting, "Cheney would be the constant disrupting force in the Anglo-American relationship. If Donald Rumsfeld, US Defence Secretary, discomfited Blair with his public disdain for multilateralism, Cheney sought to undermine the Prime Minister privately."

Undoubtedly, Blair's "Cheney flank" also reflects, as high-level British sources have told *EIR*, an attempt within the British establishment to neutralize the effects and activities of Cheney and the neo-conservatives in the United States, which are seen as undermining the "multilateral, UN-centered approach that is favored in Britain." But for Blair personally, this is unlikely to gain much mileage.

Such machinations will not help Blair much. It is an irony that, on the same July 17, 2003 on which Kelly died, Blair was in Washington, getting an ecstatic reception in the U.S. Congress. He declared then, that the Americans and British will be judged by history for the Iraq war, and "history will forgive us." All too soon for Blair, history is proving very unforgiving.