

Blair Fights One War Too Far—At Home

by Mark Burdman

The strains at the highest levels of the British political establishment reached such intensity during the last week of June, that two of the U.K.'s most powerful institutions, the Prime Minister's 10 Downing Street and the government-owned British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), engaged in open political warfare. The immediate issue behind this brawl, is the anger in leading British circles, that Prime Minister Tony Blair and his entourage falsified information on alleged Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD), in order to bring Britain into war against Iraq. The anger is becoming all the greater, as each day presents new and alarming evidence, that the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq is a fiasco, with British and American soldiers regularly coming under attack.

But there is a deeper issue involved, in the "war of institutions." This is a time of global systemic financial disintegration, and certain British insiders are alarmed, that Blair has thrown in his lot with U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney's "Straussian" fascist junta, which aims to use the deepening crisis, to establish a fascist-imperial world order. For such concerned Britons, the dilemma is exactly that faced by Winston Churchill, in the late 1930s-early 1940s, when he was fighting that pro-Hitler clique in the U.K., centered around Lords Beaverbrook and Halifax. To fight this threat, Churchill approached U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, imploring his aid for a global fight against the Nazi threat.

In view of this perception today, it is likely no accident that, in recent weeks, Lyndon LaRouche, the man who has declared political war against the neo-conservative followers of the late Leo Strauss in the Bush Administration, has gained greater prominence on the British scene. On June 6, the *Glasgow Herald* favorably reported on LaRouche's role in catalyzing resistance to the Straussians. Soon thereafter, LaRouche was able to present his ideas on the subject, in a late-night interview on BBC.

Campbell Goes Berserk

The last week of June witnessed astonishing performances by Alastair Campbell, the 10 Downing Street Director of Communications, widely known as Blair's "spin doctor." Extremely close to Blair, Campbell is arguably the most powerful figure in the British government, often exceeding Blair himself, in his murky manipulations.

In midweek, Campbell appeared before the House of

Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, to answer charges that he had presided over the fraudulent February 2003 dossier on Iraqi WMD (widely known as the "dodgy dossier"), and that he had been responsible for inserting the absurd contention, in a September 2002 British government dossier, that Iraq could assemble WMD "in 45 minutes," and immediately threaten the British Isles. That latter claim was repeated, more than once, by Blair himself.

Campbell, in response, essentially did a *mea culpa* on the first charge, admitting that 10 Downing Street had utilized an old academic paper on Iraq, and had wrongly claimed that the information came from the British secret services. But on the "45 minutes" charge, he went into the first of many tirades against BBC, whose defense correspondent, Andrew Gilligan, had reported, based on an unnamed intelligence source, that Campbell had "sexed up" the September 2002 dossier, to make the threat from Iraq seem much more menacing than it really was.

After his House of Commons appearance, Campbell raced unannounced, on June 27, into the Channel 4 news studio, and confronted the startled news presenter Jon Snow, insisting that he, Campbell, was the victim of vicious misinformation, and challenging Snow on a number of points. As the week ended, he peremptorily demanded a retraction and apology from BBC, on Gilligan's "sexed up" story, and began a campaign to discredit Gilligan.

In British terms, this is quite strong stuff. BBC, in what many Britons like to refer to as the U.K.'s "post-imperial" era, is one of the mainstays of global British influence. Its World Service beams news and other programs to tens of millions of people daily, across the world. Blair himself has often referred to BBC proudly as a key arm of British influence around the world. Even more ironic, is that BBC Chairman Greg Dyke gained his job after contributing a substantial sum of money to Blair's Labour Party, and has often been denounced as a "Blair lackey." But in the current episode, Dyke and senior BBC officials have fully backed Gilligan, and have stood up to Campbell's blackmail.

On June 28, BBC News director Richard Sambrook accused Campbell of waging a "personal vendetta" against Gilligan, "a journalist whose reports on a number of occasions have caused you discomfort." He refused Campbell's demand for an apology. Campbell immediately responded, by accusing BBC of "weasely words" and "sophistry," of circulating "their lie, broadcast many times on many outlets, that we deliberately exaggerated and abused British intelligence, and so misled Parliament and the public."

Beyond the personalities, a key factor in the brawl is this: BBC has been a vehicle, whereby certain British secret service and military figures opposed to Blair's course of action in Iraq, have been able to get out their point of view. In what appears to be a Blair-Campbell move to strengthen their position, certain Armed Forces chiefs were dragged out, during

the week of June 30, to criticize the BBC for “too negative” coverage of the Iraq military campaign. But likely, this will only stiffen the resolve of those influentials, in and around the BBC, to keep up the pressure.

‘It Will End in Tears’

There were hints, early in July, that there would be efforts to smoothe over this political war, and reach some kind of settlement. But matters have gone so far, that it is more likely that Campbell will soon be shown the exit door.

In a July 2 discussion, a London insider exclaimed, “I think Tony Blair has no choice, but to dump Campbell, as soon as possible. The man is out of control! And the more this fight festers, it will do irretrievable damage to the political structure here.” He insisted that, despite all public appearances to the contrary, Blair has been looking for a pretext to get rid of his spokesman.

On June 29, the leading Glasgow weekly, the *Sunday Herald*, ran a brutal commentary about Campbell, which could be read as a political obituary. Entitled, “Spinning Out of Control: Has Alastair Campbell Gone Mad?” the piece began: “Those whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad.”

The paper wrote that his behavior “appeared to confirm what has become the received wisdom in the higher echelons of broadcasting and politics: the Prime Minister’s director of communications, the sultan of spin, has flipped his lid.” The *Sunday Herald* reported that on June 28, Sir Bernard Ingham, who had been Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s Press Secretary, told BBC Radio 4’s Today program: “There are only one or two explanations for Alastair Campbell’s behavior. He has flipped his lid, completely gone crackers—or he is demob happy. And if he is not demob happy, someone should give him cause to be.” “Demob” (demobilization) means stepping down from office, resigning, or being fired.

The *Sunday Herald* surmised that Campbell’s recent “alpha male” blow-ups with BBC and with Channel 4 could be explained by the motivation of going for broke, to defend Blair, and to break the back of the opposition to Blair, on the WMD issue. But this is a very high-stakes game: “This is not just a spat. It is a series of hostile exchanges between two of Britain’s most important and powerful institutions. This is the biggest fight of Campbell’s career. He has taken on two enemies who may ultimately prove to have a stiffer resolve than he has: the BBC and the country’s secret services. If he is to prove himself, he will have to do so at the expense of some pretty powerful forces. And victory would be pyrrhic because eventually Blair will have to come on to the battlefield.”

Indeed, Blair will have to appear before the House of Commons, during the week of July 7, for further discussions



British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s “spin doctor,” Alastair Campbell, is wildly attacking the BBC for criticizing Blair’s Iraq policy. Will Campbell be dumped, as a political liability? Here, Blair with President Bush at a NATO meeting last year.

on Iraq and related matters.

The *Sunday Herald* concluded, by endorsing the view of Sir Bernard Ingham, on Campbell: “If he thinks he’s done OK, he’s deluding himself. The media have their knife into him now. It will end in tears. It always does.”

‘War Under a False Pretension’

The more serious issue involved in this fight, was underscored by the *Guardian*’s security/intelligence expert Richard Norton-Taylor, in a June 28 commentary. “What is certain,” he wrote, “is that, for months, the intelligence and security services have been expressing deep concern about pressure placed on them by their political masters, and the use to which their secret information would be put. . . .

“The security and intelligence services knew full well that any dossier would be shamelessly used by the government to promote a war against Iraq, a war they were generally opposed to on the grounds that, far from making the world a safer place, it would make it more dangerous. . . .

“Why a war, now? they asked. Iraq was being successfully contained. It was an argument which became even stronger when UN inspectors returned to Iraq at the end of last year only to be withdrawn for failing in a few weeks to find what tens of thousands of invading Americans and Britons have yet to discover.”

Norton-Taylor pointed to the “suspicion” in such circles, “that we were all taken to war under a false pretension.”

As extremely serious as that may be, it is even worse, that Blair has engineered Britain into an alliance, with a war party in the United States, which recalls, in its policies and motives, the fascist species that Winston Churchill mobilized Britain to fight, over 60 years ago. The old man is probably turning in his grave.