

LONDON, JULY 2005: BUSINESS AS USUAL

The recent acts of violence on London's public transport system have been shocking not just in their ferocity, but also in their banality. Londoners on their way to work can no longer be ignorant of the extent to which we are at the mercy of religious terrorism on the one hand and state terrorism on the other. No less shocking, but even less surprising, has been the contemptible and contemptuous response of the political élite to the violence, with their risible denials of any connection between the attacks on London and the war on Iraq, and their shameless defence of a Metropolitan Police which cannot help committing murder while 'doing its job'. The situation is nakedly obvious: Bush, Blair and the terrorists are all playing the same game on the same field; it is only the team strips and mascots that are different. As Bush himself put it with breath-taking effrontery at the G8 summit just a few hours after the July 7th bombings:

'The contrast couldn't be clearer between the intentions and the hearts of those of us who care deeply about human rights and human liberty, and those who kill – those who have got such evil in their heart that they will take the lives of innocent folks.'

We have nothing to add to this extraordinary comment.

The wake of the bombings on 7th July, the further attempted bombings on 21st July, and the murder of Jean Charles de Menezes on 22nd July have seen a great outpouring of outrage and condemnation. At the time of writing it is hard not to believe that there will be further violence and further condemnation on London's tubes, buses and perhaps elsewhere. The purpose of this communiqué is not to add our voice to this condemnation. It should not need to be stated that we neither sympathise with nor support the attackers on either side, and we feel nothing but grief for the pain of those killed, maimed or bereaved by them. But the mass acts of condemnation and commemoration, epitomised by the two minutes' silence on 14th July, is of a piece with a wider long-term trend in public life which expresses dissent on a mass scale only to neutralize it. From the two minutes' silence to Live 8, the mystique of participation turns political emotion into a public spectacle and thereby 'raises awareness' or 'expresses solidarity' while leaving the world around us unchanged. In short, the ritual of condemnation is all about business as usual.

In the immediate aftermath of 7th July, Londoners were urged – by the commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, no less – to get back to our desks on Monday morning and to 'defy the bombers' by returning to business as usual. The same refrain has been heard many times since then, although London's terrorized workers know only too well that their getting back onto public transport has less to do with defiance than with paying the rent. Business as usual means getting back onto the tube train where you know others like you have already been bombed and shot; watching the bombings in London and Baghdad on your TV and somehow pretending that they are not the same thing at all; going back to work because the continuing operations of capitalism and the state – including the war on Iraq – depend on it; having serious conversations with your friends about 'striking a balance' between civil liberties and national security, as if this so-called dilemma were not simply the recto and verso of the same bloodstained social contract.

We do not need further condemnation of the violence. Expressing horror does nothing. Indignation and moral outrage are ultimately just another lot of empty verbiage. We call not for condemnation, but for revolt; not for unity, but for dissent; not for religious tolerance, but for universal and indiscriminate blasphemy; not for mutual respect, but for mutual masturbation in a spirit of the Blitz that pays as much homage to the sex in the blackout as to the everynight courage. Abandon your desks, throw down your tools, take over the streets, bring the city to a standstill again, this time not in terror but in a surge of desire, possibility and imagination. Above all, don't fall for the comforting drudgery of business as usual. It was business as usual that got us into this shit-storm; don't you think it's time to put a stop to it?

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