

Militarising the Body Politic: Manifestations of neofeudal corporatism in political language about the war on Iraq

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Abstract

In this paper we argue that the term “capitalism” is no longer useful for understanding the current system of political economic relations in which we live. Rather, we argue that the system can be more usefully characterised as neofeudal corporatism. Using examples drawn from a 300,000 word corpus of public utterances by three political leaders from the “coalition of the willing”—George W. Bush, Tony Blair, and John Howard—we show some defining characteristics of this relatively new system and how they are manifest in political language about the invasion of Iraq.

Introduction

Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry. ... But now we can no longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense; we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United States corporations.

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence -- economic, political, even spiritual -- is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

—Eisenhower (1961)

Eisenhower's 1961 "farewell" speech warns against the emergence of the system in which we currently live. Elsewhere we have characterised the system as 'neo-feudal corporatism' (Graham and Luke, 2003). While our use of the term 'feudal' is in part anachronism, we use it to foreground our assertion that a qualitatively new set of social relations has gained predominance, not to argue that a return to a previous system has happened.

Those who lived in systems characterised by historians as "feudal" would most certainly have never described themselves as such (Brown, 1974). In fact it may well be said that feudalism first appeared in the mid-eighteenth century as 'an early essay in comparative jurisprudence' (Maitland, 1888 in Brown, 1974: 1064). Without venturing into the various arguments about whether feudalism did or did not exist, it is worth noting that, in distinction, few political economic systems have been as self-conscious as those that defined the twentieth century to some large extent. Neither feudalism nor mercantilism had theorists that called themselves "feudalist" or "mercantilist". Nor did anybody living in those historical periods expressly theorise a system they called "feudalism" or "mercantilism". In stark

contrast, numerous people throughout the twentieth have identified themselves with the various “isms” that have been touted as labels for political economic systems throughout the twentieth century – capitalism, national socialism, communism, fascism, and so forth. But these have tended to function in more obfuscatory than revealing ways, hiding a slow progression to a global system of relations that display sharp differences to capitalism, whether seen as an ideal type or an approximation thereof.

Contemporary arguments for and against Capitalism

Capitalism, it has been said over and over, has triumphed as the political economic system. It is the sole remaining alternative—“the one best way” (Kanigel, ***). Such a view is bolstered time and time again, and from every visible source. Whether claiming to be “left” or “right”, progressive or conservative, scholars, politicians, and public pundits of all persuasions express the view that the political economic system we live in can comfortably be called capitalism (Fukuyama, 1995; Harvey, 2001; Hutton & Giddens, 2000; Jessop, 2002; Soros, 2000). Here is a typically hyperbolic statement about the state of capitalism:

Capitalism has become the universal social and economic order of our time, Throughout the twentieth century it has been challenged from right and left, but with the fall of the Communist Soviet Union, it has emerged triumphant and stronger than ever before.

This new capitalism differs from that of previous eras, however it is truly global, aided by extraordinary advances in technology and communication, and by unfettered global financial markets. Capitalism has a speed, inevitability and force that it has not had before. (Giddens, ***).

“New capitalism” (Fairclough, Giddens), “global capitalism” (Jessop), “hypercapiatalism” (Graham), “postmodern capitalism” (Harvey)—the constant flow of descriptors claiming that

capitalism, in some form or other, is alive and thriving comes from practically every sphere of public discourse.¹ This has a number of unhelpful effects. The most deleterious of which is that it offers no alternative political economic understandings of the system in which we live. In such a situation, all that is left to contention is whether capitalism is good or bad, whether it makes things worse or better, and so forth. So, depending on one's attitude towards capitalism, when arguments about political economic systems are put forward, the scripted arguments "for" and "against" are trotted out and played, over and over, like a badly scratched record, leading to the inevitable conclusion that capitalism is unstoppable and universal, for better or worse, and that we must therefore embrace, fight, or adapt to the system.

The resultant lack of alternative understandings has been exacerbated by left leaning scholars who have attempted to characterise the current system in terms of capitalism without realising that a) it is probably not capitalism at all, and b) that there are no critical arguments against capitalism that can have any beneficial effects in the current context because their function is to promote and sustain a false ideal. That is to say: any arguments about capitalism—for or against—only serve to bolster the widespread notion that capitalism is a universal, global system of political economic relations when, in our assessment, nothing could be further from the facts.

Our purpose in deploying the term 'neo-feudal corporatism' as a construct is to reject any characterisation of the current system as capitalism, and to foreground certain aspects of the current system that reveal its underlying character, especially those aspects that have become most apparent since the events of September 11 2001. These events consisted of buildings in the US being damaged or destroyed after they were hit by commercial

aeroplanes, thereby causing the deaths of 2,882 people, most of whom were civilians.

Horrendous as those acts might have been, the number of deaths itself is not large, even in comparison with everyday violence in the US.² Yet following these events, amplified as they were by a global mass media system, the US and its allies responded by first invading Afghanistan and then Iraq.

New policies were drafted and passed ostensibly to protect people from further terrorism. The PATRIOT act is one such act (de Beaugrande, in press). “Homeland Security” Ministries and Departments are appearing throughout the world, especially among “the coalition of the willing”, the corporatist comitatus (of which more below). “Globalisation” has been given short shrift, and the nation-state has once again become the focus of political dialogue. Here is an example of text from George Bush that implicitly rejects the possibility of further globalisation:

[1] This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens -- leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. This is a regime that agreed to international inspections -- then kicked out the inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world. States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic. We will work closely with our coalition to deny terrorists and their state sponsors the materials, technology, and expertise to make and deliver weapons of mass destruction. [gwb09: 1213]³

In text [1] we see why globalisation cannot exist in the current context. This is discourse uttered by the head of the world’s most powerful army, and it promotes antagonism and violence between opposed nation-states organised into blocs. The ‘evil’ other is an amorphous entity presented in agnate movements from a regime, to States like these that have terrorist allies, to an axis of evil comprised of terrorists with state sponsors. The axis of

evil is bent on hurting the United States, its allies—our coalition. There can be no globalisation in such a situation. Globalisation is dead. The world is once again divided into “for” and “against” everything the US allegedly “stands for”, as if it were a free-standing semiotic.

Processes of militarisation and the character of political forms

In the militarisation of bodies politic, the character of their latent tendencies and future orientations become apparent (Graham & Luke, 2003). This is well evidenced in the Creel Committee’s efforts during World War I. George Creel was charged with ‘preparing’ the United States for the First World War through the Committee on Public Information (hereafter, CPI) (Creel, 1920, 1941; Larson & Mock, 1939; Lasswell, 1927; Lutz, 1933; Steele, 1970). At the time, the US was expressly, if not actually, an isolationist nation. The CPI’s success in galvanising popular support for the US to enter the war in Europe was remarkable, if only for its contribution to the reversal of widespread isolationist sentiment. In successfully selling war to the US public, Creel manufactured a first approximation of an American polis coordinated through mass mediations, creating a self-conscious body politic organised around a militarising moment.

Despite the lack of instantaneous electronic mass media, the CPI successfully reached and influenced a massive cumulative audience, with quantity of production, distribution and quality assurance substituting for speed and replicability. The domestic section of the CPI was explicitly a discursal weapon—it ‘had for its aim the instruction of the public for entering the war and historical matter of an educational nature’ (Larson & Mock, 1939: 14). This was achieved largely by volunteer ‘writers, educators, and translators’ who, within only

two years, disseminated ‘more than 75,000,000 pieces of literature’ (1939: 14).⁴ The CPI enlisted every available communications technology for organising public opinion: press, film, and theatre; civic organisations such as the Boy Scouts, ‘women’s organizations, churches, and schools’; cartoonists, photographers, painters, and other artists; ‘novelists, writers, and professors’; and immigrant organisations comprised of ‘the foreign born’ all became media for the militarising function of the CPI (1939: 12-16). The messages were staged to cut across popular and ‘high culture’, mass and elite, formal and informal outlets. As Creel puts it:

There was no part of the great war machinery that we did not touch, no medium of appeal that we did not employ. The printed word, the spoken word, the motion picture, the telegraph, the cable, the wireless, the poster, the sign-board—all these were used in our campaign to make our own people and all other peoples understand the causes that compelled America to take arms. All that was fine and ardent in the civilian population came at our call until more than one hundred and fifty thousand men and women were devoting highly specialized abilities to the work of the Committee, as faithful and devoted in their service as though they wore the khaki.

[...] What we had to have was no mere surface unity, but a passionate belief in the justice of America's cause that should weld the people of the United States into one white-hot mass instinct with fraternity, devotion, courage, and deathless determination. The *war-will*, the will-to-win, of a democracy depends upon the degree to which each one of all the people of that democracy can concentrate and consecrate body and soul and spirit in the supreme effort of service and sacrifice. What had to be driven home was that all business was the nation's business and every task a common task for a single purpose. (Creel, 1920: 5)

Creel’s ‘Four-Minute Men’, comprised of 75,000 ‘locally endorsed speakers’, gave prepared speeches four minutes in length ‘on behalf of war aims at a theatre or other meeting place’, reaching a total audience in excess of 300 million people (Larson & Mock, 1939: 14-15). At

the same time, in an effort that predated the emergence of broadcast mass media in the interwar period, more than forty films were made in the glorification of the war effort (Creel, 1920). In this way, Creel's approach combined a locally-based, putatively 'grassroots' push (local soapboxes) with a centrally developed and replicable apparatus of multimedia production. A notable example of the latter was the personification of the US body politic in James Montgomery Flagg's *Uncle Sam*, which first gained recognition in the 'I want you' army recruitment poster (Library of Congress, 2002). The poster had a print run of four million during the 18 months of the CPI's activities and made such a successful and lasting impression that it was used throughout WWII for recruitment. It remains a powerful and recognisable icon of the militarised US body politic.

The establishment of a nationally organised and centralised body for the propagation of warlike attitudes in the US—and for the suppression of pacifist ones—was a milestone in strategic mass communication. In the space of two years, without the aid of electronic mass media; through thousands of newspapers, magazines, periodicals, and civic organisations; in pictures, words, slogans, and legislative acts; in what Creel called 'a plain publicity proposition, a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the world's greatest adventure in advertising' (Creel, 1920), the CPI built a militarised public consciousness. This was achieved in a far less centralised, asynchronous, and unruly media blend, with nothing like current patterns of corporate ownership, board and CEO control, media convergence, and cross-media marketing and messaging.

The example of Creel tells us a great deal about the institutional precedents and habits so visible and durable in the US, especially since the events of September 11, 2001.

Ironically, less than twelve months prior to the CPI, Wilson had narrowly won the 1916

presidential election with the slogan 'He kept us out of war', just as Bush had promised to bring US troops home in a debate with Al Gore prior to the 2000 elections. Creel successfully assaulted public memory and significantly contributed to the historical construction of the most powerful militarised body politic in history. At the same time, he created a set of symbols and attitudes, and strategies for deploying these, that have been used to militarise the US body politic ever since. He created an elaborate symbolic apparatus which, when set in motion, excites a multitude of historical sentiments, parts of which are quite ancient.

Some of these are evident in the following words spoken by George W. Bush:

[2] I strongly believe that America is going to change one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time. Because the spirit of this country, a selfless spirit, is alive and well. There are thousands of people all across New Orleans and Louisiana and all across America who understand the responsibility of being an American. It's more than just making a living. The responsibility of a true patriot is somebody who's willing to serve something greater than themselves, serve their country. And one way to best serve your country is to love your neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself. No, there was tremendous evil done to America, but out of the evil is a new spirit, a vitality of the American spirit, perhaps best represented by the folks on Flight 93. The story, in my judgment, is going to be one of the profound stories of the September the 11th, 2001, tragedy. It captures what I know is the strength of our country. People were flying across the land and they heard the airplane they were on was going to be a weapon. Imagine what went through their minds. They eventually got their thoughts together, they called their loved ones and said goodbye and I love you. History will show that a prayer was said. One guy said, "Let's roll." These citizens took the plane into the ground to save lives, to serve something greater than themselves. That spirit of America is so strong and so alive, it allows me to boldly predict that, out of the evil done to this country, is going to come incredible good, not only a peaceful world, but a more compassionate and hopeful and decent America for every citizen who's lucky enough to live in this country. [gwb16: 3441]

Ancient sacrifice and new technologies; an appeal to the spirit of patriotism, civic responsibility, and Christianity; incredible good and great evil; the heroic individual and the victory of the nation; and, of course, the promise of a coming utopia are all opposed, juxtaposed, and conflated in text [2] in order to promote a militarised public consciousness. Some of these elements are at least a thousand years old (Graham, Keenan, & Dowd, in

press).

Creel and the development of Corporate *Comitatus*

The President's Management Agenda, announced in the summer of 2001, is an aggressive strategy for improving the management of the Federal government. It focuses on five areas of management weakness across the government where improvements and the most progress can be made. (Office of Management and Budget, 2004)

The comitatus, a group of warriors whose political organisation was based on personal loyalties to a chief or king, was at the core of the feudal political system (Koehl, 1960; Stephenson, 1941, 1943: 245). The comitatus 'was essentially a public relationship: the followers swore fealty to their leader, gave him warlike service, and were subject to his judicial control' (Stephenson, 1941: 792). It was also 'fundamentally aristocratic', being comprised of free men 'who considered the bearing of arms a distinction and companionship with a famous warrior a source of honor' (1941: 796). Under Charlemagne and his successors, out of an urge to create a Europe-wide system of political organisation, land and other tenures were granted to leading members of the Charlemagne's comitatus (1941: 793). A system of tenure called vassalage thus emerged. It was organised around the institution of 'the feudum or fief', the basis of tenure being 'essentially military because the original vassalage was a military relationship' (1941: 797-8). It was also a personal relationship, reliant upon the dual acts of homage and fealty by the vassal to the lord (Bloch, 1962 ***).

The comitatus of feudal society is the model of today's neofeudal corporatist system. The system is global in reach; relies on personal loyalties, tenures, benefices, religious sentiment, and the arbitrary exercise of executive power. Above all, it is organised around militaristic and militarising pursuits. Here [3] is an exemplar of neofeudal corporatist discourse:

[3] No stages. This is total war. We are fighting a variety of enemies. There are lots of them out there. All this talk about first we are going to do Afghanistan, then we will do Iraq, then we take a look around and see how things stand. That is entirely the wrong way to go about it ... If we just let our vision of the world go forth, and we embrace it entirely, and we don't try to ... piece together clever diplomatic solutions ... but just wage a total war against these tyrants, I think we will do very well. Our children will sing great songs about us years from now. (Richard Perle, 2001, as cited in Dixon, 2001)

Besides holding an influential defence policy role in the US administration, Perle is well known for his long involvement in defence industries. He remains a partner in Trireme, a company that invests in homeland defense, and 'serves as a director of a company doing business with the federal government: the Autonomy Corporation, a British firm that recently won a major federal contract' (Hersh, 2003). 'Total war' is an attractive financial scenario for people in defence industries. But Perle is also

The last time public discourse took such a shape as Perle's was in National Socialist Germany:

Total war is the demand of the hour. ... The danger facing us is enormous. The efforts we take to meet it must be just as enormous. The time has come to remove the gloves and use our fists. ... We can no longer make only partial use of the war potential at home and throughout Europe. We must use our full resources, as quickly and thoroughly as it is organizationally and practically possible. Unnecessary concern is wholly out of place. ... Those who today do not understand that will thank us tomorrow on bended knees that we courageously and firmly took on the task. (Goebbels, 1943/44: 167-204)

National Socialism was a distinctly feudal form of political organisation (Koehl, 1960). As Koehl puts it, the National Socialists 'quite consciously turned to feudal and medieval models for political relationships' (1960: 921). Consequently the

comitatus (Gefolgschaft) for the Nazis was the natural political unit, the model for all political relationships ... National Socialists denied allegations that the "leadership principle" was equivalent to unrestrained and arbitrary tyranny ... Far from extolling

naked force, the Führerprinzip was “the rediscovery of the basis of political power: loyalty.” And behind that loyalty lay the “full and honest acceptance of responsibility” by the strong. Thus the National Socialist ideology made much of “Germanic” feudalism and condemned the modern state both for its autocratic and its bureaucratic elements. (Koehl, 1960: 922).

This is not to say that the current global system we are calling neofeudal corporatism is modelled on National Socialism. To do so would be far too facile. It might well be argued, though, that National Socialism was nothing but an incipient and crude form of neofeudal corporatism that presaged the demise of Capitalism as a useful analytical construct for contemporary political analyses. That is to say, rather than being an aberration in the apparently seamless political development of Western Societies, it may well be the case that National Socialism was ahead of its time in terms of political “progress” in the West, not that such an abhorrent regime can be termed “progressive” in any sense other than that it may have marked an irreversible progression in political economic history.

The elements of neofeudal corporatism that we identify above are present in political language about the invasion of Iraq. Personal bondage between representatives of the bodies politic that comprise “the coalition of the willing” is evidenced throughout the language of their political leaders, and there are recognisable hierarchies of allegiance expressed within such language. Here is George Bush:

[4] Prime Minister Blair ... He is a friend, he is a strong leader, we are bound by the strong conviction that freedom belongs to everybody and that we have got to work together to make the world a more peaceful place. ... In order to achieve peace all countries in our region must take responsibility to do their best to fight off terror, and I know the Prime Minister joins me as we mourn the loss of life. [gwb_tb01: 56]

This is well in keeping with the spirit of comitatus: Blair is a friend to Bush, a strong leader—a companion in war. Bush and Blair are bound by a common code and a common

purpose, the rightness of which is apparently unquestionable. The pact of comitatus is echoed by Blair in response:

[5] Once again let me thank President Bush for coming here. Let me say as well as our own pride in our own forces during the course of this conflict we have watched with immense admiration the skill and tenacity and professionalism of the American forces. This is a strong alliance, we are strong allies and I think day by day the proof of the wisdom of that alliance grows. [gwb_tb06: 982]

Along with a reaffirmation of the bond between Blair and Bush, there is a clear deference to US military might evident in Blair's words. While he naturally feels pride for British force, he has immense admiration for the US military, particularly for its tenacity and professionalism, a distinctly corporatist term when applied to organised and massive violence. Blair is paying homage to his most honoured liege.

John Howard, Australia's Prime Minister, pays homage to both Blair and Bush. This is most marked by his deference to their leadership.

[6] I do want to record my respect for the leadership displayed by President Bush. It's easy to attack the President of the United States. The United States is the most powerful country in the world, they're an easy mark for all the critics and all the people who have grumbles. And I think he's shown a very strong commitment to a set of attitudes and to an outcome and he's given very impressive leadership. And can I also say as a fellow participant in a parliamentary system of government how much I admire the leadership of Tony Blair on this issue. [jh14: 2,443]

Howard pays public respect to the leadership of Bush and expresses his admiration for the leadership of Tony Blair. Once again there is a reference to a set of attitudes, a code of vaueur by any other name. Typical of the corporatist register, the invasion and destruction of an entire country is reduced and sanitised to become merely an issue that can be solved through strong leadership. Australia's political leader goes a step further and displaying subservient vassalage to the point of expressing complete dependency:

[7] America has given very strong leadership to the world on the issue of Iraq. [...] Alliances are two-way processes and our alliance with the United States is no exception and Australians should always remember that no nation is more important

to our long-term security than that of the United States. [jh40: 502]

Once again, the issue of Iraq is presented as a management problem that has been solved through strong leadership. Howard takes the opportunity to remind Australians that they owe allegiance to the US because the Australian body politic is its vassal, and its long-term security depends on doing service to the US at its bidding.

Corporate raiders of the US body politic

The hegemon to which Howard mistakenly pays tribute is, however, not “the United States” or “Americans”. It is the military-industrial complex that Eisenhower warned against; an entirely corporate and corporatist constituency that has no national roots, or at best only ostensive ones. Richard Perle, for instance, maintains a residence in Provence (Russell, 2003). The degree of cynicism required to be an arms-dealing defence advisor for the US government, advocating perpetual war whilst holidaying at one’s residence in Provence, is difficult to comprehend. Cynicism aside, it was a well-noted function of “globalisation” to disperse corporate ownership and membership whilst simultaneously separating ownership from control and distancing administrative activities from productive ones, regardless of the particular domains in which a corporate entity operates (cf. Roe, 2000; Saul, 1997). Whether commercial or theological; media or military; legislative, executive, or judicial in function; the corporate constituents of the new hegemon are globally dispersed yet systematically interdependent parts of a global administrative complex.

DynCorp is an exemplar. In 2003 it was recruiting “rent-a-cops” for the newly “liberated” Iraq, just as it has done in other places around the world, including Bosnia, Afghanistan, Colombia, and the US, where it ‘reviews security clearance applications of

military and civilian personnel for the Navy' (Chatterjee, 2003). DynCorp's advertisement for new positions in Iraq conveys a sense of the complex and confusing relationships that have been forged in the new environment:

On behalf of the United States Department of States, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, DynCorp Aerospace Operations (UK) Ltd. (DAOL), a CSC Company, is seeking individuals with appropriate experience and expertise to participate in an international effort to re-establish police, justice and prison functions in post-conflict Iraq. Interested applicants must be active duty, retired or recently separated sworn police officers, correctional officers or experienced judicial experts. US citizenship is required. (DynCorp, 2003).

An 'aerospace operations' company purporting to be located in the United Kingdom recruiting a private-sector police force for the US Federal government to impose order on a country in the Middle East and requiring employees be US citizens is *prima facie* confusing. Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC), DynCorp's new owner, was the first software company to be publicly listed (in 1964) and has operated since 1959—its major clients include Raytheon (makers of Patriot missiles and significant amounts of other military hardware), the United States Marines, D&B (formerly Dunn & Bradstreet), and BT (British Telecom) (CSC, 2003). While its corporate headquarters are in California, it has operations in 69 countries (CSC, 2003). At June 2002, CSC had 119,340 globally dispersed shareholders, many of whom are themselves publicly listed corporations (CSC, 2002: 61).

For shareholders of CSC, and those of other corporations awarded 'massive' contracts (predicted to be worth more than \$US100 billion) for 'dynamic reconstruction' in "post-conflict" Iraq, corporate "nationality" is entirely irrelevant (cf. World Trade Executive, 2003). In fact, a direct function of globalisation has been the de-territorialisation, dispersion, and distancing of ownership, commercial, financial, administrative, and productive

functions. Allegiance to particular national or regional labour forces has become, at best, a commercial liability (Klein, 2000; Saul, 1997).

The close links between transnational corporations, the Whitehouse, and the Pentagon in the current US administration are well documented: all but a few members of Bush's cabinet have intimate ties to transnational corporations, the largest of which have military connections (Centre for Responsive Politics, 2003; Kellner, 2002). Vice-President Dick Cheney has received a million dollars per year in 'deferred compensation' payments from Halliburton since retiring as the corporation's CEO immediately after his nomination as Bush's running mate in 2000 (CBS Broadcasting, 2003; Cable News Network, 2000). Halliburton has received 'billions of dollars worth of reconstruction contracts' in "post-war" Iraq (Jehl, 2003). People such as Cheney and Perle function as little more than corporate lobbyists—courtesans—who now have direct control of the world's most powerful military force. Like the worst courtesans of the ancien regimes, they appear entirely unconcerned with the welfare of the body politic over which they claim stewardship (Saul, 1997).

Benefice, booty, and the "reconstruction" of Iraq

A defining feature of feudalism was the distribution of benefices, the rewards of loyal military service usually granted in the form of land or entitlements to draw revenues from the produce of a land and its people. The Bush administration parceled out reconstruction contracts, such as those given to Halliburton and Bechtel, before the Iraq war had even begun (Center for Responsive Politics, 2003b). For the corporations involved, it is a "win-win" situation: there are revenues from weaponry and military facilities, and from the damage those weapons and facilities cause.

Here is how the various benefices of neofeudal corporatism are expressed in Bush's political language:

[8] From the outset, I have expressed confidence in the ability of the Iraqi people to govern themselves. Now they must rise to the responsibilities of a free people and secure the blessings of their own liberty.

Our strategy in Iraq will require new resources. We have conducted a thorough assessment of our military and reconstruction needs in Iraq, and also in Afghanistan. I will soon submit to Congress a request for \$87 billion. The request will cover ongoing military and intelligence operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, which we expect will cost \$66 billion over the next year. This budget request will also support our commitment to helping the Iraqi and Afghan people rebuild their own nations, after decades of oppression and mismanagement. We will provide funds to help them improve security. And we will help them to restore basic services, such as electricity and water, and to build new schools, roads, and medical clinics. This effort is essential to the stability of those nations, and therefore, to our own security.
[gwb35: 1,661]

Bush's benefices are apparently to be parceled out to the people of Afghanistan and Iraq. He firstly bequeaths them the blessings of their own liberty, but they must rise to secure those.

The \$87 billion he is requisitioning from the taxpayers of the US is, of course, to be paid mostly to corporate contractors to repair the damage of mass bombing campaigns. However, he shifts the blame for the need for reconstruction on decades of oppression and mismanagement, as if oppression were not a form of "mismanagement", as if the campaign of destruction branded "Shock and Awe" were not the primary cause of reconstruction needs.

Blair also has a clear picture of how feudal in character the corporate benefices are. Responding to widespread public criticism about the way the US administration awarded reconstruction contracts, he says this:

[9] All this stuff in the media about the Americans giving out the contracts, all that has happened is this. American aid, legally under American law, is tied to American trade and commerce. So the actual American aid that America is giving to Iraq, they let the contracts for their own companies. That is a completely different thing from the reconstruction contracts for Iraq itself that will be let by the interim Iraqi authority and it will be up to them to decide, not the Americans, or the British, or anybody else to decide, but for them to decide who gets those contracts. So again a lot of these stories are not actually correct. There is no question of us trying to tie up British or

American commercial interests with this. [tb21:1,937]

As we have seen, and as is widely known, the corporations that were awarded the major reconstruction contracts in Iraq are transnational, with the largest contractor being a subsidiary of Halliburton. Under Cheney's leadership, 'the number of Halliburton subsidiaries registered in tax-friendly locations', such as the Cayman Islands, 'ballooned from nine in 1995 to 44 in 1999', thus resulting in a 'dramatic drop in Halliburton's federal taxes, which fell from \$302 million in 1998 to less than zero - to wit, an \$85 million rebate - in 1999' (Huffington, 2002). It is true but misleading of Blair to identify American aid with American trade and commerce. American aid is certainly tied to a national body politic: it is paid for by American taxpayers. The American trade and commerce that Blair refers to is an entirely different sort of "American": it is American in name only, with the bulk of its operations and profitable revenue flows typically being located in offshore tax-havens (Huffington, 2002).

When Blair says there is no question of us trying to tie up British or American commercial interests with this, he is merely reiterating the fact that there is no need to try—it is a requirement of US law that contracts funded by US aid must go to US companies, regardless of where they pay taxes. In other words, there is a legal requirement for corporate beneficence in the structure of US Federal law. Weapons, prisons, oil mining and refining, sea port management, electricity and water supplies, policing and other security functions—practically every "essential" service in the US is provided by a member of its corporate comitatus, a corollary of Reaganomic era "privatisation". The most influential members of the comitatus populate the US cabinet and presidential advisory boards, and they have done so for many decades (cf Saul, 1997; Moore, 2003). Consequently, the comitatus can now

plan and launch a war; parcel out reconstruction contracts for essential services; control the extraction of precious minerals and metals; and, through global media networks, present this corrupt process to the world as being of great benefit to the people whose land has been occupied by force.

In the matter of benefice, Howard is far more subservient and far less expectant than Blair.

[10] Well ladies and gentlemen as you know I'll be going shortly to the United States where I'll see President Bush and I'll have the opportunity of spending some time with him and Mrs Bush at the Bush family ranch in Texas. We'll talk about the bilateral relationship, reconstruction, the challenge ahead in Iraq, the possible progress on a free trade agreement between Australia and the United States, circumstances in our own region and most particularly North Korea and it will be an opportunity of course with the fairly extensive amount of time for bilateral discussions to cover each of these issues in some detail. [jh11:177]

The lure of a free trade agreement between Australia and the US appears to have been a deciding factor in Australia's involvement in the "coalition of the willing" (Davidson, 2003), yet we see here how heavily modalised is the expectation that such an agreement will eventuate—it is merely possible progress towards such an agreement. For Howard, merely to be in the presence of the US President is an opportunity, especially since the meeting is to take place in the Bush family ranch. There are no expectations here, only hopes for beneficence. The reference to reconstruction is worth comment. When it was announced in Australia that the US administration would only allow US corporations to bid for reconstruction contracts, representatives of the Australian corporate sector were publicly outraged (Inbaraj, 2003). Since making this statement, both the free trade agreement and Australian business involvement in the reconstruction "Bonanza" in Iraq have been secured by the Australian government.

Since the second age of feudalism, few political forms have achieved such degrees of

distance between ruling elites and the ruled, confusing distinctions between property rights, proprietary discretion, executive privilege, and military force (cf. Bloch, 1962: 345-354). Like 'second age' feudalism, the feudal aspects of our current age are characterised by contractual allegiances underwritten by an intense religiosity and militarism; systematic corporate subjection (or the subjection of one group to another) through ties of political and economic interdependence; 'the rigorous economic subjection' of the great majority of people 'to a few powerful men'; 'the identification of wealth ... with power'; and the highest of economic priorities being placed on the maintenance of a professional military class. Far from reflecting a new totalising force of the state, it arises from and accelerates a 'profound weakening of the State' (1962: 441-452).

Neofeudal corporatism and the militarised body politic

The most overt similarity between our current age and that of feudalism proper is the social logic of a "permanent arms economy"—a total "protection racket" (White, 1962). In feudal societies, excess agricultural production was promoted for the maintenance of a professional military class. Most historians accept that 'feudalism was essentially military, a type of social organization designed to produce and support cavalry' (White, 1962: 3). The currently dominant form of social organisation is "designed" (in the same loose sense) to produce and support high-tech, massive, globally operative, corporately owned military institutions.

Today, the largest item of trade in tangible things is the trade in arms (Saul, 1997: 21). But the predominance of militaristic values only begins with armaments. Research, military personnel, government personnel, public relations campaigns, intelligence services,

and multi-million dollar movie budgets can all be put under the banner of military expenditure (Herman & Chomsky, 1988/1994). When added to security budgets more generally – police, jails, private security firms, border protection forces, multilateral peace-keeping forces – along with the various and invariably large bureaucratic, ministerial, and administrative organisations associated with these combined parts of the disciplinary industrial complex, the expenditure on organised legitimate violence, and the suppression of organised illegitimate violence both domestic and transnational, is literally incalculable.

This is even more so when one considers that the global mediations of corporate militarism reach into practically every level of consumer society. The density and reach of corporatist mediations makes it impossible to delineate militaristic mediations along public-private lines, or, within that, between individual and collective interests, or between general activity and specifically military activity. Among the largest corporate manufacturers of military hardware and software can be found some of the world's largest personal finance companies (General Electric, General Motors); telecommunications and IT companies (Siemens, Texas Instruments, IBM, NEC, Toshiba); media and entertainment companies (CBS, NBC, HMV, EMI); aeroplane manufacturers (Boeing, McDonnell Douglas, Lockheed Martin, British Aerospace), household appliances (Samsung, General Electric); and car makers (General Motors, Rolls Royce, Ford, Mitsubishi, Fiat, Daimler-Benz). Consumers and investors cannot help but subsidise military research, development, and manufacturing, however directly or indirectly. Consumers (“commoners”) are now woven into a global network of militarised corporate mediations at almost every level of existence; if not by direct consumption, then by direct or indirect taxation, investments, pension funds, and insurance.

Militarism is also a pervasive production value for corporatist culture industries. As one commentator notes:

The special history of the United States has given us a very unique mythology of violence. We tend to regard certain forms of violence – violence that pits advanced against primitive peoples, whites against non-whites – as violence that produces good things, produces progress, produces moral advancement, produces civilization.
(Slotkin, 1994, in CDI, 1994)

It would be one thing if such “entertainments” were merely a by-product of a social consciousness which had emerged from total immersion in militaristic milieux. But militaristic production values are direct, strategic, and purposive. The Center for Defense Information (CDI) details almost a century of direct and conscious involvement by the military in the production of movies (CDI, 1997)—a practice which began with Creel. The CDI documents extensive, ongoing, and direct military involvement in major Hollywood “blockbusters” (the name of a bomb), including direct censorship tied to ‘hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of subsidies, and scripting decisions over major productions designed to impress upon the public the virtues of military ideals and technologies (CDI, 1997). As Arnold Pacey (1999/2001) points out, the fact that extreme and explicit violence is a staple theme in the mass entertainment economy should give pause for concern.

The roots of US feudalism and their continued re-emergence

It is worth remembering that the Europeans came to the Americas at the height of feudalism (Mumford, 1964: ch 1). Not surprisingly, ‘far from starting life anew’, the settlers of the New World ‘carried with them their typical medieval institutions and continued the same processes’ (1964: 7; cf also White, 1965). Thus the seed crystals of neofeudal corporatism were transported to the Americas in incipient form. Upon settling the New

World, ‘all America ... became a bloody arena, in which Europeans fought out their ancient rivalries’ (Ellis, 1966: 13).

Even the most modern aspects of the US – its extensive technological dynamism – can be attributed to the feudal spirit: the ‘dynamic project of Western technology, the defining mark of modernity, is actually medieval in origin and spirit’ (Noble, 1997: 9). The New World was thought to be the ‘new Eden’, a place that was to become the promised Heaven on Earth, a conceit reiterated time and time again by early Protestants and reflected in later US attitudes to war, religion, and technology (Mumford, 1964: ch 1; Noble, 1997: ch 7). Again, Bush’s discourse is redolent with intertextual references to high feudal sentiment. Bush is hailed as ‘God’s President’ by the Christian Right (Conason, 2002). His discourse resonates with the millenarian consciousness that has infused technocratic elites throughout the West since at least the twelfth century (Noble, 1997). The weight of Christianity’s evangelical history, according to “God’s President”, is the joint burden of Americans and God.

[11] On this Thanksgiving, our nation remembers the men and women of our military, your friends and comrades who paid the ultimate price for our security and freedom. We ask for God's blessings on their families, their loved ones and their friends, and we pray for your safety and your strength, as you continue to defend America and to spread freedom. Each one of you has answered a great call, participating in an historic moment in world history. You live by a code of honor, of service to your nation, with the safety and the security of your fellow citizens. Our military is full of the finest people on the face of the earth. I'm proud to be your Commander-in-Chief. I bring greetings from America. May God bless you all. [gwb06: 600]

Here, in [11], the historical depths of the feudal comitatus relationship are summarised and drawn upon in [11]: sacrifice of life in the glory of the greater good; unquestioning loyalty; historical consequence; the unbridled praise of military service above all else (the finest people on earth); the code of honor; are all invoked by the priest-king-warrior who asks for

God's blessings upon his military cohort as he sends them to propagate freedom throughout the lands of the infidel.

But it must be remembered that it is only a mere 140 years since the most devastating civil war tore the country apart. Even now, the US is far from homogeneous, perhaps less so than it ever was. According to the person whose job it was to unite public opinion at the turn of the twentieth century, the nation was

torn by a thousand divisive prejudices, stunned by the voices of anger and confusion, and muddled by the pull and haul of opposed interests. These were conditions that could not be permitted to endure. What we had to have was no mere surface unity, but a passionate belief in the justice of America's cause that should weld the people of the United States into one white-hot mass instinct with fraternity, devotion, courage, and deathless determination. The *war-will, the will-to-win*, of a democracy depends upon the degree to which each one of all the people of that democracy can concentrate and consecrate body and soul and spirit in the supreme effort of service and sacrifice. What had to be driven home was that all business was the nation's business and every task a common task for a single purpose. (Creel, 1920)

At the inception of its westernisation, North America was, as Ellis points out, a miniature of mediaeval Europe—fractured, fragmented, and violently antagonistic. This is a fact that remains evident to anyone who has toured the US to any extensive degree. It is a patchwork quilt of cultures and subcultures, religious and political differences, so much so that Creel's efforts have had to be repeated, time and time again. Bush, too, must address and overcome the same divisions as Creel:

[12] Beyond all differences of race or creed, we are one country, mourning together and facing danger together. Deep in the American character, there is honor, and it is stronger than cynicism. And many have discovered again that even in tragedy -- especially in tragedy -- God is near. In a single instant, we realized that this will be a decisive decade in the history of liberty, that we've been called to a unique role in human events. Rarely has the world faced a choice more clear or consequential. Our enemies send other people's children on missions of suicide and murder. They embrace tyranny and death as a cause and a creed. We stand for a different choice,

made long ago, on the day of our founding. We affirm it again today. We choose freedom and the dignity of every life. [gwb09: 3,838]

The welding of America into Creel's "white-hot mass instinct" was an achievement of discourse; an exercise in the production of mass mediated meanings designed to unite the nation symbolically and attitudinally. It remains so.

The activities of the CPI helped to build, and clearly heralded, a future of ever-closer collaborations between public and private organisations that has continued through to the present. Creel relied on corporations, commercial and otherwise, to propagate and enforce his policies of censorship and militaristic image building. The Center for Defense Information (CDI) details almost a century of direct and conscious involvement by the military in the production of movies (CDI, 1997)—a practice that began with Creel. The CDI documents extensive, ongoing, and direct military involvement in major Hollywood "blockbusters" (the name of a bomb), including direct censorship tied to 'hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of subsidies, and scripting decisions over major productions designed to impress upon the public the virtues of military ideals and technologies (CDI, 1997). According to a US Department of Defence (DOD) spokesperson,

"Top Gun" ... prepared the American people for the Gulf War. Before the completion of the rehabilitation [of perceptions about the US military post-Vietnam PG], the American people had more or less decided the United States military couldn't do what it said it could do. "Top Gun" showed that we could shoot down airplanes, that our aircraft carriers could go anyplace, and that our pilots were the best. And so, when the Gulf War comes along, there's no reason for any American civilian to believe that we can't beat Saddam Hussein. (Philip Strub, in CDI, 1997)

Whether named "Public Relations", "Propaganda", "Strategic Communication", or "Integrated Marketing Communication", the techniques and strategies referred to in the

above comments by Strub have their roots in the activities of the CPI. Yet Urban II, who launched the first crusade in 1095, used essentially similar strategies (Graham, Keenan, and Dowd, in press). The particulars of these general strategies for militarising bodies politic necessarily change with the ‘societal order of discourse’ (Fairclough, 1992), are achieved by means of the most effective forms of mediation available and enacted by the most legitimate speakers of the day.

Creel trailblazed the close collaborations between government, corporations, artists’ guilds, and scholarly organisations in the prosecution of war. The CPI’s propaganda was written ‘by the country’s foremost publicists, scholars, and historians’, with ‘the various universities lending their best men and the National Board of Historical Service placing its three thousand members at the complete disposal of the Committee’ (Creel, 1920: 6). His advertising campaign was translated into ‘many languages other than English’ and ‘went to every corner of the world, carrying [America’s] defense and ... attack’ (1920: 6). His instigation of modern discursal warfare emphasised ‘the importance of the spoken word’ and included a ‘speaking division’ that

toured great groups like the Blue Devils, Pershing’s Veterans, and the Belgians, arranged mass-meetings in the communities, conducted forty-five war conferences from coast to coast, co-ordinated the entire speaking activities of the nation, and assured consideration to the crossroads hamlet as well as to the city. (1920: 6-7)

The CPI’s ‘photography division’ distributed ‘more than two hundred thousand’ photographs ‘at no cost’. It also ‘conceived the idea of the “permit system,” that opened up our military and naval activities to civilian camera men’ and ‘handled ... the voluntary censorship of still and motion pictures in order that there might be no disclosure of information valuable to the enemy’ (1920: 9). During the invasion of Iraq, beginning in

March 19, 2003, the photography division's "permit system" legacy was evident in the use of 'embedded reporters', journalists licensed by the US military to officially "cover" the war. Not surprisingly, '[r]esearchers found that although reporters who accompanied the British and US military were able to be objective, they avoided images that would be too graphic or violent for British television. Some of the coverage resembled a "war film"' (Wells, 2003).

Enough

Much more could be said about the neofeudal character of the current age, especially in the US: the bulk of excess production going to fund a warrior class of corporations; the extreme cost of training and arming US soldiers, thus leading to the army's marketing slogan, "An Army of One", so redolent of the armoured knight; the glorification of war; the deep and cynical use of religious fundamentalism as a war tool; the facile division of the world into Good and Evil; the unquestioning loyalty that is expected of those in corporate, military, and government bureaucracies—the similarities are almost endless. Our point is this: that any part of humanity should still be engaged in feudal pursuits—literally a protection racket funded by political and economic monopolies—is appalling. It should not continue. Yet the current feudal impulses are in large part the product of discursive efforts, such as those by Creel. Marketing and entertainment are at the core of contemporary militarism. There is no practical or moral reason for such behaviours. To put it plainly: we should know better.

Creel's propaganda methods, which became the study of Goebbels, Lasswell, Bernays, and many other highly successful war propagandists, provided the basis for a brutally militaristic attitude that is now fully expressing itself. It is also important to remember that the regime acting upon the US body politic at the moment is not the United

States or Americans: it is a cohort of corporate courtesans who have hijacked the symbolic resources developed by Creel and his later counterparts which have come to represent the US. It would be folly to suggest that the corporate comitatus could be removed from power by discursal means alone, but these will play a large part in any remedies to the current situation.

But to think of the current system as Capitalist is misleading. In comparison to the current system, capitalism looks like a positively favourable set of circumstances. But it was an entirely different set of social relations. People owned means of production and tended to have more responsibility, more at stake in a very personal way. In a corporatist world, there is no personal accountability—that is the very meaning of “proprietary limited”. The idea of the corporation was invented to remove accountability, responsibility, risk, and competition (Saul, 1997). Corporatism and capitalism are entirely different relations of production. The corporation, the comitatus, and the committee are collective means of elite control designed to remove the need for personal responsibility and to replace it with loyalty, secrecy, and bondage. For Iraq, and for the wars to come, we are bound, we think, to see the extension of corporatism to totalitarianism. The feudal spirit—with its roots so deep in western culture—has re-emerged. It is the stuff of children’s tales, which makes it very appealing in an age of narcissism. However, it is a system that was forged by means of discourse and we would like to think it could be fought by similar means. Whether or not remains to be seen. But it is incumbent on analysts of political language to deploy counter-discursive strategies against neofeudal corporatism before it becomes even more destructive than it is at present.

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¹ John Ralston Saul (1997) is a notable exception.

² In 2000, 29,350 committed suicide in the US: 'of this number, 57% (16,586) were completed using a firearm. ... 'In 1998, 30,708 people in the United States died from firearm-related deaths - 12,102 (39%) of those were murdered; 17,424 (57%) were suicides; 866 (3%) were accidents; and in 316 (1%) the intent was unknown. ... For every firearm fatality in the United States, there are two non-fatal firearm injuries.' (Brady Campaign, 2004). It is also worth noting that while the West mass-mourned the deaths of less than 3,000 people in New York and Washington, 12 million people in Africa were starving to death (World Health Organisation, 2002).

³ Texts are referenced by corpus code word numbers. We used Wordsmith Tools to analyse the texts.

⁴ May 1917-June 1919