editorial comment

Several of the articles in this issue are both timely and related to a common theme. As we go to press, the United States government is threatening to block the return of weapons inspectors to Iraq in the absence of a UN resolution spelling out 'decisive consequences' to be faced by Saddam Hussain in the event of a failure to disarm. And, in what appears to be an ultimatum to the UN, George Bush has said, 'If the United Nations Security Council won't deal with the problem, the United States and some of our friends will.' Believing that it has a 'special relationship' with the US, Britain has been Bush's most supportive European ally on this issue. Often in the recent past, its support for US foreign policy has led Britain to acting as a linchpin in relations between the United States and Europe. And in view of the rather less gung-ho attitudes towards the prospect of war predominant in other key chancelleries of Europe this role has acquired, and may continue to acquire, heightened significance. One of the ways in which *EPS* seeks to serve the political science community of Europe is by carrying pieces giving busy political scientists essential background analysis related to current important events. We are therefore delighted to publish the article by Alasdair Blair on the nature of Britain's relations with the US and the EU.

The United States' threat to block the return of weapons inspectors would suggest that Iraq's recent offer to allow the inspectors back into the country cannot resolve the crisis. Combined with Bush's threat to go to war preferably with, but if necessary without, UN backing, this suggests that an invasion to topple the Iraqi regime is not a question of 'if' but of 'when'. 'We refuse to ignore', Bush has said, 'the aggression and brutality of evil men'. As Alessandro Pizzorno points out in his article on perspectives on democracy, 'Like any other religious form, democracy … wages its crusades. These are meant, we are told, to abolish the presence of political evil in the world. Traditionally, crusades proposed to achieve the same objective by converting peoples to the *true* religious faith. Now they have in mind a conversion to the *true* political regime'.

Whether the Iraqi regime really does pose a military threat, or whether the crisis is about a desire to control the country's oil supplies, as a 'political mobiliser' the discourse surrounding 'weapons of mass destruction' is clearly a very powerful one – as recent shifts in public attitudes towards the war testify. For it implicitly rules out as illegitimate, or at the very least eccentric, opposition to the conclusion drawn from it, namely war as a reasonable response. Deploying language to wield power is of course at the heart of politics and has arguably been central to the lack of resistance encountered by the UK government to the introduction to

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British universities of auditing and 'quality assurance' techniques in recent years. Here, the rhetoric deployed often surrounds the notion of globalisation, and the need for 'quality assured' education systems if national economies are to keep pace with 'inevitable' forces of change. Yet as Charlton and Andras point out in their article, auditing as it has been conducted hitherto has been unable to measure teaching quality in any meaningful sense since the methods deployed and the assumptions made are simply not designed to yield the kinds of measurement expected of them.

Despite this, the British Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) equated its technical definition of teaching quality with the notion of 'high quality', 'which has to do with excellent outcome measures, not system properties.' In thus seeking to get behind the public relations 'spin' of the QAA, Charlton and Andras might be said to be engaged in an exercise not altogether dissimilar to the concerns of discourse analysis, which forms the topic of our symposium guest-edited by Terrell Carver. Particular issues and approaches in political philosophy and political theory will, we anticipate, form the foci of future symposia offering, as this one does, a useful overview of the substance of a specific school of political thought.

It seems to us that this is one important way in which the journal can fulfil its mission of seeking to contribute to the development of a self-conscious community of European political scientists. Additional ways are by putting members of the profession in touch with new information resources and sources of data, by offering a forum for comment and debate, and by hosting pieces on the nature of the profession itself. The piece by Voerman et al. speaks to the first of these concerns; the pieces by Forrestier and McRae to the second, and the pieces by Manteltasche and Oldersma to the third.

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