

## **Soundings discussions**

At the very end of 2001, *Soundings* hosted an evening's discussion on the war in Afghanistan. It was hastily organised in the context of, and in response to, what seemed like a deafening silence over the deeper and more difficult issues raised by the actions of Bush and Blair and the discourses mobilised around them. We had time, also, for only the most minimal of advance advertising. Yet the meeting was packed, and people were having to be turned away from the doors. The debate was complex and thought-provoking, and we are grateful to all those who took part. We open this issue with papers drawn from the opening contributions of that evening: from Stuart Hall, Chantal Mouffe, and Gary Younge.<sup>1</sup> These are followed by further contributions on the crisis from David Slater (another participant in the meeting), Eli Zaretsky and Bob Hackett. Whilst even now the bombing and the 'war against terror' continues and may yet be extended, debate over the some of the bigger issues raised has often been inadequate in the mainstream media, and has sometimes been shied away from altogether.

This was by no means the first time *Soundings* has organised political discussion beyond the pages of the journal itself (for example there have been joint events with *Signs of the Times*, regular Saturday morning seminars, and a series of conferences and meetings on Emotional Labour, following up the theme of Issue Number 11) - and this is activity we want to continue. Events like these help the journal to be more than just a three-times yearly publication, and give stimulus and focus to its thinking. We are now planning a conference on the theme of 'Privatisation and the Public' (temporarily eclipsed by war but never far from everyone's mind). As with suggestions for Themes for future issues, please contact us with suggestions for topics and offers to organise such events.

The rest of this issue continues our established commitment to diversity of topic and style: Jonathan Rutherford contributes a critical essay on the new knowledge economy, and the increasing commodification of intellectual property;

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1. Thanks to colleagues at *Red Pepper* for providing the tapes of the meeting, and to Sarah Benton for chairing it.

Les Back reflects on some of the miseries still being endured in New Labour Britain; Anne Costello and Les Levidow analyse the neoliberal flexibility agenda, and document some recent struggles against the EU-wide campaign by European business to erode workplace rights in the name of economic competitiveness; Linda McDowell finds that myths about a widespread yob culture serve to conceal some of the very real problems in the complex lives of young working-class men; Grazyna Kubica offers a selection from the diary she kept of her travels in Britain, interspersing them with extracts from the much earlier diaries of Bronislaw Malinowski; and finally there is our usual eclectic selection of poetry and reviews.