



PICTURE OF THE WEEK

KOFI Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations, has awarded this year's prestigious Prix Pictet photography prize for environmental sustainability to British-based photographer Nadav Kander.

The Prix Pictet is an annual search for photographs that communicate powerful messages of global environmental significance under a broad theme. This year that theme is "earth". Kander was nominated for his series of photos, *Yangtze, The Long River Series, 2006-07*, documenting the rapidly changing landscape and communities of China's Yangtze River, from its mouth to source.

ARTIST STATEMENT

"The Yangtze River is the main artery that flows 4,100 miles across China, travelling from Qinghai Province in the west to Shanghai in the east. It is embedded in the consciousness of the Chinese, even those who live thousands of miles away, and plays a significant role in their spiritual and physical life.

"More people live along its banks than live in the US, one in every 18 people on the planet.

"Using the river as a metaphor for constant change, I have photographed the landscape and people along its banks from mouth to source.

"Importantly for me, I worked intuitively, trying not to be influenced by what I knew about the country. I wanted to respond to what I found and felt and to seek out the iconography that allowed me to frame views that make the images unique.

"After several trips to different parts of the river, it became clear that what I was responding to and how I felt while being in China was permeating my pictures: a formality and unease, a country both at the beginning of a new era and at odds with itself, a nation that appears to be severing its roots by destroying its past in the wake of the sheer force of moving 'forward' at such an astounding and unnatural pace, a people scarring their country and a country scarring its people.

"A Chinese man I met while working on the project reiterated what many Chinese people feel: 'Why do we have to destroy to develop?'. He explained how, in Britain, many of us can revisit the place of our childhood, knowing it will be much the same, will remind us of our families and upbringing. In China that is virtually impossible, as the scale of development has left most places unrecognisable. 'Nothing is the same. We can't revisit where we came from because it no longer exists.'

"China's landscape, economically and physically, is changing daily. These are photographs that can never be taken again."



Griffin smirks while real villains get away with grand larceny

IAN MACWHIRTER



to appear on Question Time was vindicated, and not just because the BNP is, whether we like it or not, a legitimate political party with elected members and a million votes, but because it forced Griffin out of his comfort zone.

The BNP leader is a plausible, even fluent performer in conventional news interviews where he's only required to craft a soundbite or two.

But when he was exposed to debate, and a live audience, he turned into a guilty schoolboy trying to disguise the fact that he'd been bullying kids with special needs.

Really, we have nothing to fear from these people except fear itself.

But what really annoyed me about this particular edition of Question Time was that it ignored the most important issues of the week – the postal strike and the governor of the Bank of England's devastating commentary on the banking bail-out. The Royalist has taken leave of his senses and seems determined to commit hara-kiri before Peter Mandelson privatises it.

Everyone attacked the BNP for quoting Winston Churchill, but it was governor Mervyn King, above, who adapted Churchill's rhetoric to most devastating effect last week.

"Never in the field of financial endeavour," King told a gathering in Edinburgh, "has so much money been owed by so few to so many. And, one might add, without any real reform."

The £1 trillion banking bail-out was, Hallelujiah! We really should be most grateful in history", adding: "It is hard to see how the existence of institutions that are 'too important to fail' is consistent with being in the private sector."

In other words, the behemoth banks need to be broken up or taken into public ownership, just as this column has been arguing all year.

I'm not used to finding myself on the same side as the guv'nor, but these are



“Why were there no demonstrations outside the Royal Bank in Gogarburn or Lloyds in London?”

not normal times. It was an unprecedented intervention by a figure who is generally regarded as a spokesman for the City of London.

King condemned the government and the regulators, not just for handing taxpayers' money to people who don't deserve it, not just for racking up the biggest public debt outside wartime, but for endangering the future financial welfare of the country by allowing a banking oligarchy to take over the economy.

It was like the chairman of the Equalities Commission accusing the government of being racist.

Now, I'd all but stopped writing about the banking crisis because people seem to have lost interest in it.

There's a mood around that the worst is over and that the economy is back on track again, which as King points out is very far from the truth.

We are still mired in recession – the longest economic period in 1955 – and the Bank of England is still electronically printing money to try to prevent another financial cardiac arrest. Meanwhile the government is borrowing 13% of GDP with no clear idea of how it is going to pay this money back.

But it's business as usual in the City where banks are preparing to award themselves a staggering £6 billion in bonuses this year, 50% more than in 2008.

Yet, had it not been for the £1 trillion in public money devoted to rescuing them from their own folly, most of these banks would have ceased to exist. This is not far short of legalised theft. It is not only just the biggest bail-out in history but the biggest bank raid in history by a caste of financiers who clearly believe that they are no longer accountable to anyone but themselves.

The billions the banks are blowing on bonuses are only there because of direct and indirect subsidies from the taxpayer. This is most obviously the case in semi-

nationalised banks like RBS. But even banks such as Barclays, which didn't take cash from the government, have been beneficiaries of the government's bail-out.

Without the government's asset relief programme, Barclays would be bust, because all the big banks would be bust.

I'm at a loss to understand why the public has been so quiescent on all this.

Why were there no demonstrations outside the Royal Bank in Gogarburn or Lloyds in London?

We've developed a very strange set of political priorities, getting worked up about one of the petty criminals of the political world, Nick Griffin, when the real villains are getting away with grand larceny.

One of the main reasons the government hasn't been tougher with the banking kleptocracy is that public opinion does not appear to demand it.

MEANWHILE, the banks have been lobbying assiduously behind the scenes, persuading government ministers that if they only allow them to go back to their old ways they'll fill the hole in public finances and start lending to first-time buyers.

I suppose the answer is that blocking the BNP is easy and makes us feel good – they're fascists, after all.

The workings of the financial system are opaque and difficult to understand. It's never quite clear what we want banks to do: lend more to home-buyers or less; make credit easier or more difficult.

We want the government to spend to save the economy, but we don't want it to leave our children in penny paying off the debt. So we've indulged in self-righteous bear-baiting while the real predators pick our pockets.

Well, we get the economy we deserve,

THE BNP leader Nick Griffin was predictably awful on Question Time. He exposed himself as a tongue-tied demagogue whose repellent views on the Holocaust, race and homosexuality are thinly concealed beneath a new Labourish veneer of respectability. What did come as a surprise was how dreadful the rest of the panel was.

Baroness Warsi, the Tory communities spokeswoman, Chris Huhne, the Liberal Democrat MP and the Justice Secretary Jack Straw spent much of the programme trying to out-do each other on how tough they would be on immigration, thus doing Griffin's job for him.

As did the deputy director of the British Museum, Bonnie Greer, who claimed that we were all Africans because that's where the British came from after the last ice age.

Presumably, the European and British collections of the British Museum will be reclassified accordingly.

At times I wasn't sure who was more barking, the fascist or his detractors. Fortunately, the audience and David Dimbleby saved the day.

The BBC's decision to allow Griffin

MCCHATTER Big bonuses are back and greed is good again. Thanks, Lord Griffiths

LET us now give thanks for Lord Griffiths of Fforestfach, vice-chairman of Goldman Sachs International. Speaking on ethics last week at a gathering in St Paul's Cathedral, the investment banker dismissed all the politically correct twaddle about the poor being blessed and the rich being as likely to enter the kingdom of heaven as a camel getting through the eye of a needle. Lord Griffiths has found the solution to that: just buy a bigger needle and outsource the camel. Job done.

"We should not be ashamed" of big bonuses, declared Lord Griffiths in his sermon on the Mount of Cash. "Inequality is a way of achieving greater opportunity and prosperity for all."

Hallelujah! We really should celebrate the selflessness of Goldman Sachs executives for being prepared to shoulder the burden of the £1.4 billion to be paid out in bonuses this year.

What better way to feed the poor and help the needy than to stuff the mouths of investment bankers with money? Some of this will spill from their mouths, like crumbs from the table, to feed the little people who do tasks for the rich, such as

look after their children, clean their houses and wash their limos. Bless.

But that isn't all. The bankers will be inspired to even greater heights of enterprise, creating ever more ingenious financial instruments which will in turn spread wealth and prosperity across the land.

Some of them might even pay taxes – though this is not the best way to help the poor. Oh no. Taxes only go to funding worthless institutions like the National Health Service and the education system, which are a drain on profitability and stifle enterprise. Taxes should be recycled

to provide incentives for more wealth creators to come to Britain to help the poor by becoming filthy rich.

The presence of these apostles of accumulation will help our weak and feeble institutions to find the way and the light. Take Royal Mail. It is clearly in a terrible state because the people who run it are not being paid enough. They should be replaced by bankers on multi-million-pound bonuses, who would sack all the employees, turn the pension fund into a structured investment vehicle and start selling junk bonds based on the income stream from government subsidies.

At a stroke, Royal Mail's problems would be over. Instead of being a boring organisation delivering letters that no one actually wants, it would become a dynamic centre of financial engineering.

It could create wealth and in turn allow its executives to employ even more butlers, party planners and moat cleaners.

It's good to know that greed is good again. Some of us were beginning to wonder, what with all the banks going bust. But that was merely the Lord testing our faith in enterprise and the philanthropy of self-interest. Amen.

THE WEEK IN NUMBERS

42%

The proportion of fathers who feel work prevents them from spending enough time with their children, according to Equality and Human Rights Commission research

75

The average life expectancy of the Scottish male – 3.5 years longer than at the beginning of the 1990s, when the figure was last estimated, but still 2.7 years less than his English equivalent, and almost five years less than the average Scottish female

£278,000

The pay-off given to Glasgow City Council departing head of education Margaret Dornan. It includes a £64,000 redundancy payment, £29,000 in lieu of notice and £185,000 from the pension fund