

Blair, War, Olympic Deals and a Glimpse of Another Britain

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This is a story of two letters and two Britains. The first letter was written by Sebastian Coe, the former athlete who chairs the London Olympics Organising Committee. He is now called Lord Coe. In the New Statesman of 21 June, I reported an urgent appeal to Coe by the Vietnam Women's Union that he and his IOC colleagues reconsider their decision to accept sponsorship from Dow Chemical, one of the companies that manufactured dioxin, a poison used against the population of Vietnam. Code-named Agent Orange, this weapon of mass destruction was "dumped" on Vietnam, according to a US Senate report in 1970, in what was called Operation Hades. One estimate is that today there are 4.8 million victims of Agent Orange, many of them shockingly deformed children.

In his reply, Coe describes Agent Orange as "a highly emotional issue" whose development and use "was made by the US government [which] has rightly led the process of addressing the many issues that have resulted". He refers to a "constructive dialogue" between the US and Vietnamese governments "to resolve issues". They are "best placed to manage the reconciliation of these two countries." When I read this, I was reminded of the weasel letters that are a specialty of the Foreign Office in London in denying the evidence of crimes of state and corporate power, such as the lucrative export of terrible weapons. The former Iraq Desk Officer, Mark Higson, called this sophistry "a culture of lying".

I sent Coe's letter to a number of authorities on Agent Orange. The reactions were unerring. "There has been no initiative at all by the US government to address the health and economic effects on the people of Vietnam affected by dioxin," wrote the respected US attorney Constantine Kokkoris, who led an action against Dow Chemical. He noted that "manufacturers like Dow were aware of the presence and harmfulness of dioxin in their product but failed to inform the government in an effort to avoid regulation." According to the War Legacies League, none of the health, environmental and economic problems caused by the world's most enduring chemical warfare has been addressed by the US. Non-government agencies have helped "only a small number of those in need". A "clean up" in a "dioxin hot spot" in the city of Da Nang, to which Coe refers, is a sham; none of the money allocated by the US Congress has gone directly to the Vietnamese or has reached those most severely disabled from the cancers associated with Agent Orange.

For this reason, Coe's mention of "reconciliation" is profane, as if there were an equivalence between an invading superpower and its victims. His letter exemplifies the London Olympics' razor-wired, PR and money-fuelled totalitarian state within a state, which you enter, appropriately, through a Westfield mega shopping mall. How dare you complain about the missiles on the roof of your flats, hector a magistrate to 86 residents of London's East

End. How dare any of you protest at the “Zil car lanes”, reminiscent of Moscow in the Soviet era, for Olympic apparatchiks and the boys from Dow and Coke. With the media in charge of Olympics excitement, as it was for Shock and Awe in Iraq in 2003, now enter the man who played a starring role in making both spectacles possible.

On 11 July, a so-called Olympics evening, “a coming together of the Labour tribe”, declared the Labour Party leader Ed Milliband, celebrated its “star guest” Tony Blair and his 2005 “gift” of the Games and “provided the perfect opportunity for Blair’s return to frontline politics”, reported the *Guardian*. The organiser of this contrivance was Alistair Campbell, chief spinner of the bloodbath Blair and he gifted to the Iraqi people. And just as the victims of Dow Chemical are of no interest to the Olympic elite, so the epic criminality of Labour’s star guest was unmentionable.

The source of the Olympics’ chaotic security is also unmentionable. As established studies in Britain have long conceded, it was the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the rest of the “war on terror” that served to recruit new jihadists and bolster other forms of resistance that led directly to the London bombs of 7/7. These were Blair’s bombs. In his current rehabilitation, courtesy of his Olympics “legacy”, there is the additional spin that Blair’s huge post-Downing Street wealth is concentrated on charities.

The second letter I mentioned was sent to me by Josh Richards who lives in Bristol. In March 2003, Josh and four others set out to disable an American B-52 bomber based at RAF Fairford, Gloucestershire, before it could bomb Iraq. So did four other people. It was a non-violent action faithful to the Nuremberg principles that a war of aggression was the “paramount war crime”. Josh was arrested and charged with planning to lay explosives. “This was based on the ludicrous idea,” he wrote, “that some peanut butter I had on me was actually a bomb component. The charge was later abandoned after the Ministry of Defence performed extensive tests on my Tesco crunchy nut peanut butter.”

During two trials and two hung juries, Josh was finally acquitted. It was a landmark case in which he spoke in open court about the genocidal embargo imposed upon Iraq by the British and US governments prior to their invasion and the false justifications of the “war on terror”. His acquittal meant that he had acted in the name of the law and his intention had been to save lives.

The letter Josh wrote to me included a copy of my book, *The New Rulers of the World*, which, he pointed out, had provided him with the facts he needed for his defence. Meticulously page-marked and highlighted, it had accompanied Josh on a three-year journey through courtrooms and prison cells. Of all the letters I have received, Josh’s epitomises a decency, modesty and determination of moral purpose that represent another Britain and antidotes to poisonous Olympic sponsors and rehabilitated warmongers. During these extraordinary times, such an example ought to give others heart and inspiration to reclaim this receding democracy.

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