

# Britain: Sleepwalking into Fascism

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Global Research, January 02, 2012

[williambowles.info](http://williambowles.info) 2 January 2012

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

“[W]hen dealing with more old-fashioned kinds of states outside the postmodern continent of Europe, we need to revert to the rougher methods of an earlier era – force, pre-emptive attack, deception, whatever is necessary to deal with those who still live in the nineteenth century world of every state for itself. Among ourselves, we keep the law but when we are operating in the jungle, we must also use the laws of the jungle.” — [The new liberal imperialism](#) by Robert Cooper (Cooper by the way was a former civil service adviser to Tony Blair)[1]

In trying to get my head around the situation today, I keep returning to my parents' generation in the 1930s where they found themselves in a predicament similar to ours. Capitalism had crashed (again) and the world was faced either with a capitalism without any pretence to democracy, that is to say fascism, or socialism. A 'third way' was not even considered. Third Way? Is there one? I seriously doubt it given our understanding of the nature of economics, even if we fail to act on or recognize that such knowledge exists. If there is one crucial aspect of the propaganda war on our sensibilities, it's this.

But following WWII and the victory of the Soviet Union over fascism, capitalism was faced with the unthinkable: either it made concessions to working people or it faced revolution. What followed, at least in the leading capitalist countries, was a new 'compact' between capital and labour (that built on one already in place since the formation of the Labour Party). Led by 'the party of labour' in the UK, it instituted a series of reforms to a bankrupt capitalism and called it socialism.

In reality it was no such thing for although it created the 'welfare state' and nationalized energy, transportation and communications, in reality it was responding to two forces: on the one hand the demands of an organized working class for greater share of the pie and on the other maintaining the fundamental capitalist/imperial institutions of the former British Empire: the power of the City's financial institutions to control the global flow of trade, currencies, energy and of course the colonies.

The 'social compact' found the working class in exchange for a welfare state supporting successive imperialist governments whether they be 'Labour' or Conservative with the spoils of Empire financing the show, albeit now in a subservient role to the new kid on the block—the USA.

The 'social compact' didn't last long, 1945-1979, the year Thatcher got elected, a mere 34 years. And it's been downhill ever since barring the 'Ponzi Period', 1997-2008, with its 'prosperity' (ie debt) built on financial speculation and to the ultimate detriment of the entire planet's economy and its people and plunging us into war, destruction, deprivation and misery. If it wasn't so tragic it would be ludicrous that a relatively small number of

people and their minions should have such power and use it so short-sightedly and so destructively. And all to try and keep capitalism afloat.

**Thatcher was advised to leave Liverpool to “managed decline”**

Some fascinating and startling Cabinet papers are out today from the Thatcher era. Released under the 30 year rule, they reveal that some of Margaret Thatcher’s Cabinet advised her that Liverpool was such a hopeless case in the aftermath of the inner-city riots in 1981 that it should effectively be left to rot. The then Chancellor, Geoffrey Howe, wrote a memo to the PM rubbishing his Cabinet colleague Michael Heseltine’s plea for £100m to help rebuild Liverpool, saying this was “pumping water uphill” and that the government should instead let the area slide into “managed decline”. Clearly aware of the political dangers of such a plan, he cautioned that “this was not a term for use, even privately”. — Ch. 4 News Email, 30 December 2011

But unlike the 1930s, there is no groundswell of support for a socialist alternative to try and stem the tide. Instead, we have a deliberate process of what can only be called the ‘creeping fascism’ of our societies, one step at a time, initially under the guise of fighting ‘the war on terror’ but as has been predicted over and over again, ultimately the weapons designed to fight ‘terrorism’ have been turned against us. We have all become potential ‘terrorists’.

As with the crisis in Italy that brought Mussolini to power, where an alliance of the state and big business crushed the left and organized labour and created the Corporate State, so too even if by a different path and for different reasons and with a different face, we now have the equivalent of Mussolini’s fascism in place here in the UK and in the USA. And not a moment too soon as far as the political class is concerned as the fightback against the destruction of our hard-won gains gets serious.

“First they came for the Communists, but I was not a Communist so I did not speak out.  
Then they came for the Socialists and the Trade Unionists, but I was neither, so I did not speak out.  
Then they came for the Jews, but I was not a Jew so I did not speak out.  
And when they came for me, there was no one left to speak out for me.” —  
Pastor Martin Niemoller[2]

This is what happens to capitalism when its back is against the wall, even if opposition is sporadic and uncoordinated. It cannot risk a complete meltdown, thus its thoughts turn to that of war, what it knows how to do best, especially the UK which has been at it for the better part of 800 years. British capitalism has *always* had an economy based on war and conquest.

*If no real enemy can be found, one will have to be invented*

The problem is that there is no real enemy on the horizon. There is no Third Reich or ‘Evil Empire’, merely a rag-tag bunch of ‘rebels’—originally financed by the CIA to fight the Soviets—that grew into a network of ‘jihadists’ of one kind or another, some created in reaction to the terrorist predations of the Empire. (Who really knows? Agents provocateurs, patsies? And according to studies, most ‘jihadists’ are not religious fanatics but are mostly well-educated, quite often middle class and with secular backgrounds.)

Hence the need for a bunch of 'existential' enemies and when one goes down up pops another in an endless, downward spiral into total barbarism. What gets me though is that we have all been effectively sidelined, reduced to passive onlookers, getting our sense of events and their causes filtered through imperial glasses, presented to us as if we are in complete lockstep with the actions of our governments. We are proverbially, completely out-of-the-loop. Democracy by proxy.

Is this how it felt in the 1930s? If so, it means that in spite of all the fine words about democracy that we shove endlessly down the world's throat, we are effectively back where we started, landed with governments that are as unresponsive, probably less so than those of the 1930s, given the appallingly low voter turnout in the 'mother of democracies'.

The end product is that the political class acts with impunity invoking our collective name when it suits them when in reality the great majority of us are opposed to any kind of 'humanitarian war' let alone wars conducted in our name. And this the problem; we don't have a voice. Instead, the 'intelligentsia' speaks on our behalf.

When Labour came to power in 1945 it was swept into office by the power of the organised working class, a considerable block of voting power when mobilized. The historic link between the Labour Party and organized labour ensured that regardless of the kind of policies successive Labour governments pursued, organized labour would support them in an unholy alliance of the trade union leadership and the Labour Party's hierarchy (with reservations of course).

So strong is this bond that it has been maintained even as successive Labour governments—with the help of trade union leaders—participated in their own destruction, with the crucial exception being the public service unions, the single biggest bloc at around five million members and pretty much all that remains of a unionised working class. Not surprisingly therefore, it's these unions that have been at the forefront of opposing the 'austerity measures' being imposed by the Lib/Dem 'coalition'.

What I think is crucial here is the connection between the UK as a (former?) imperial, colonial power and the UK's working class which in spite of its radical traditions is firmly embedded in an imperial culture with all that it means. In a sense the working class have been compromised/coopted into the Imperial project, for not only have they benefited from the plunder, they have been subjected to five centuries of Imperial propaganda, based on the totally false notion of being a 'civilizing' force in the world.

Just think on how in books, plays, film and television, the 'stoical' and resolute white man, standing alone against the 'heathen', is presented, on his 'civilising mission'. Moreover, the colonies were a place where white, working class Englishmen could rise out of their class. Fleas on a fleas back as they say. And for some years, there has been a concerted effort on the part of academics to 'rehabilitate' imperialism, most notable being the historian Niall Ferguson whose books and television programmes push the idea that Empire is not only good but necessary else the dark hordes will overrun us:

...[Ferguson] draws opposite conclusions from those who have used the term ♦empire♦ to critique US global power. His principal point is that the United States, like Great Britain before it, should be an empire and that the world badly needs the US to behave like one. The problem is not, as some would have it, that great powers tend to arrogantly overstep their bounds or give rise

to countervailing forces, but that today's sole superpower is a colossus with an attention-deficit disorder, unsuited by temperament for the pesky tasks of global domination. Ferguson's *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), is an exhortation as well as a lament. If the US does not embrace history's charge and acknowledge itself as an empire, he fears, the world could suffer a new Dark Age of waning empires and religious fanaticism of economic stagnation and a retreat of civilization into a few fortified enclaves. — '[The Imperial Lament](#)' by Joel Beinin, Middle East Report Online, July 2004

If I am right about the slumbering state of the Brits, and I fear that I am, what will it take to wake them up? Some kind of cataclysm, the total meltdown of society? Jackboots in the high street? We are almost there what with millions of surveillance cameras and snooping in our emails and phone calls let alone detention without trial. Or perhaps being reduced to total penury will do it.

### Notes

1. See also my '[Let the reader be aware](#)', 10 August 2003
2. See my '[Apologies - Remember to Remind Me](#)' also written in 2003, in part about events in the 1960s that in turn referred to events in the 1930s.

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