

Cutting Clare Short: A Withering Attack on the Tony Blair Government's Decision to Wage War on Iraq

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Back in February 2004 I wrote a piece about the GCHQ worker Katherine Gun who really did 'break ranks' when she blew the lid on the UN spying operation and of Ms. Short's role in the run-up to the invasion, bits of which I think are worth reprinting here:

"The dirty tricks campaign mounted against members of the UN Security Council that included bullying, bribery and blackmail by the US to get the half dozen recalcitrant members to endorse its invasion of Iraq (a campaign that amazingly failed), has yet again exposed the bumbling English political class as an inept and divided servant of US capital. "Is there no end to Blair's screw-ups? Apparently not as the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) decision not to continue with its case against Katherine Gun for breach of the Official Secrets Act reveals. Apparently afraid that the defence would use the illegal nature of the invasion as part of its defence and that a jury would agree with Ms Gun, at the very last minute the Crown decided not to continue with the prosecution.

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"More's the pity that Ms Short didn't have the 'courage of her convictions' back when it counted, before the war was launched. Her argument, that she thought she would have more influence within the government's inner circle than outside it, rings hollow when you consider the nature of the present-day politician and the opportunistic nature of the 'political' process, where expediency rules. I find it difficult to believe that Ms Short was not aware of how the ruling class rules and Rule #1 is; don't break ranks. This is after all, the same Ms Short who voted for the war last March."

/.. /

"I'm not troubled about myself. I've reached an age [58] and stage where I'm free to tell the truth and be responsible to my conscience." — Clare Short

"Hmmm...but a year ago she hadn't yet reached that age and stage? Perhaps she should go tell the victims of Blair's imperialist war in Iraq that she is not troubled by her conscience, I'm sure they'll understand. This is after all not an issue about the state of one's conscience, it's about right and wrong (let alone the illegality of the invasion), that Ms Short was surely aware of even at a younger age and stage of her life last March.

"What I can never escape from is the knowledge that in spite of all the hot air that gets expended and all the 'breast-beating' done by conscience-stricken politicians, the Iraqi people are nowhere to be seen in the 'debate'. They figure not at all whilst the privileged members of the fourth richest country in world 'debate' the workings of the imperium.

“Where is Ms Short today as the US, with EU backing, dismembers Haiti through its proxies, Duvalier’s former death squads? Perhaps I’m old-fashioned in believing that principle comes first (even if leavened somewhat with hard-headed pragmatism). Clearly, Ms Short’s real problem is that she had to make a decision between her ‘principles’ and the threat of Labour losing power. This was after all the ultimate ‘threat’ that Blair used last March (‘back me or I’ll resign’). I don’t know the woman personally but surely she knows how the ‘game’ is played. She did say after Blair got elected leader of the Labour Party in 1994 “My God, what have we done?” so it’s not like his neo-con agenda crept up on her unseen.” — ‘Blair outGunned and then brought up Short’, 27 February, 2004.

But okay, let’s give Ms. Short the benefit of the doubt and that at long last she has spoken out in no uncertain terms, though even here her comments about the role of the UN is neither here nor there (Ms Short claims that she was persuaded to stay on with promise of UN involvement in reconstruction of Iraq, a somewhat different claim than the one she made back in 2003, that she thought she would have more influence within the government’s inner circle than outside it).

But even the craven Ms. Short’s remarks at the Chilcot ‘inquiry’ was a step too far for the ruling elite as the state/corporate media’s response to her testimony illustrates:

“Clare Short took on the mantle of crowd-pleaser. She received a warm round of applause from the public gallery after three hours of evidence.

“This was not the most dramatic session of the inquiry, but it was by far the most entertaining.

“To the disquiet of the stenographer, she maintained a furious pace in what amounted to a withering attack on Tony Blair’s government and on the workings of Whitehall.

“Words like “deceit”, “misled”, “conned”, “secrecy” and “shocked” were at the heart of her testimony. It was easy to see why some earlier witnesses to the inquiry had said Ms Short was difficult to deal with.” — ‘Clare Short says cabinet misled on Iraq war legality’, By Peter Biles, BBC News, 2 February, 2010.

Mr Biles definitely lives up to his name with these snide, sarcastic and patronizing attacks on Ms. Short, illustrating the fact that if facts get in the way then ignore them and mount an outrageous character assassination instead. What happened to BBC’s much vaunted ‘objective’ and ‘impartial’ reporting (again, and see Chris Hedge’s excellent piece on ‘objective’ journalism)?

Isn’t it amazing that when finally, a member of the political class really does break ranks with the status quo that they become “difficult to deal with” or in trying to minimize the impact of their testimony, they are nothing more than “entertaining”. This is blatant propaganda that the BBC needs to be called to account for.

Not to be outdone a Channel 4 News Snowmail had the following to offer:

“Clare Short has been up before the Chilcot inquiry into the Iraq war and secured an ovation. Only two people have done that and both of them were

women. What does that tell us about men and war?

“Her account of her exclusion from the decision to go to war makes great theatre but doesn’t, in fact, add much new to the sum total of our knowledge.”
— ‘Short at Chilcot’, Snowmail, Channel 4 News Email, 2 February, 2010

And what does it tell us about how the media deals ‘difficult’ women? Do these ‘journalists’ confer I wonder? No, they have no need to, they are all baked in the same pot (university). I don’t know who actually wrote the Channel 4 News email as it has no byline, but it has Jon Snow’s fingerprints all over it and if not him then an eager acolyte did the dirty work on his behalf.

What it does reveal is the immense power of the corporate/state media to set agendas on behalf of their political masters and do it in unbidden concert. Thus a fictitious worldview is created that manages to be patronizing, demeaning and sexist, all at the same time!

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