

# We Are Spartacus. John Pilger

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*There can't be democracy and colonial war; one aspires to decency, the other to fascism. Meanwhile, once welcomed mavericks are heretics now in an underground of journalism amid a landscape of mendacious conformity.*

Spartacus was a 1960 Hollywood film based on a book written secretly by the blacklisted novelist Howard Fast, and adapted by the screenplay writer Dalton Trumbo, one of the 'Hollywood 10' who were banned for their 'un-American' politics. It is a parable of resistance and heroism that speaks unreservedly to our own times.

Both writers were Communists and victims of Senator Joseph McCarthy, chairman of the [Government Operations Committee](#) and its [Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations](#) of the U.S. Senate, which, during the Cold War, destroyed the careers and often the lives of those principled and courageous enough to stand up to a homegrown fascism in America.

'This is a sharp time, now, a precise time ...' wrote Arthur Miller in *The Crucible*, 'We live no longer in the dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world.'

There is one 'precise' provocateur now; it is clear to see for those who want to see it and foretell its actions. It is a gang of states led by the United States whose stated objective is 'full spectrum dominance'. Russia is still the hated one, Red China the feared one.

From Washington and London, the virulence has no limit. Israel, the colonial anachronism and unleashed attack dog, is armed to the teeth and granted historical impunity so that 'we' the West ensure the blood and tears never dry in Palestine.

British MPs who dare call for a ceasefire in Gaza are banished, the iron door of two-party politics closed to them by a Labour leader who would withhold water and food from the children.

In McCarthy's time, there were bolt holes of truth. Mavericks welcomed then are heretics now; an underground of journalism exists (such as this site) in a landscape of mendacious conformity. Dissenting journalists have been defenestrated from the "mainstream" (as the great editor David Bowman wrote); the media's task is to invert the truth and support the illusions of democracy, including a "free press."

Social Democracy has shrunk to the width of a cigarette paper that separates the principal policies of major parties. Their one subscription is to a capitalist cult, neoliberalism, and an imposed poverty described by a U.N. special rapporteur as "the immiseration of a significant part of the British population."

War today is an unmoving shadow; "forever" imperial wars are designated normal. Iraq, the model, is destroyed at a cost of a million lives and three million dispossessed. The destroyer, Blair, is personally enriched and fawned over at his party's conference as an electoral winner.

Blair and his moral counter, Julian Assange, live 14 miles apart, one in a Regency mansion, the other in a cell awaiting extradition to hell.

According to a Brown University study, since 9/11, almost six million men, women and children have been killed by America and its acolytes in the "Global War on Terror." A monument is to be built in Washington in "celebration" of this mass murder; its committee is chaired by the former president, George W. Bush, Blair's mentor. Afghanistan, where it started, was finally laid to waste when President Biden stole its national bank reserves.

There have been many Afghanistans. The forensic William Blum devoted himself to making sense of a state terrorism that seldom spoke its name and so requires repetition: In my lifetime, the United States has overthrown or attempted to overthrow more than 50 governments, most democracies. It has interfered in democratic elections in 30 countries. It has dropped bombs on the people of 30 countries, most of them poor and defenceless. It has fought to suppress liberation movements in 20 countries. It has attempted to murder countless leaders.

Perhaps I hear some of you saying: that is enough. As the Final Solution of Gaza is broadcast live to millions, the small faces of its victims etched in bombed rubble, framed between TV commercials for cars and pizza, yes, that is surely enough. How profane is that word "enough"?

Afghanistan was where the West sent young men weighed down with the ritual of "warriors" to kill people and enjoy it. We know some of them enjoyed it from the evidence of Australian SAS sociopaths, including a photograph of them drinking from an Afghan man's prosthetic.

Not one sociopath has been charged for this and crimes such as kicking a man over a cliff, gunning down children point-blank, slitting throats: none of it "in battle." David McBride, a former Australian military lawyer who served twice in Afghanistan, was a 'true believer' in the system as moral and honourable. He also has an abiding belief in truth, and loyalty. He can define them as few can. This coming week he is in court in Canberra as an alleged criminal.

"An Australian whistleblower," reports Kieran Pender, a senior lawyer at the Australian Human Rights Law Centre, "[will face] trial for blowing the whistle on horrendous

wrongdoing. It is profoundly unjust that the first person on trial for war crimes in Afghanistan is the whistle blower and not an alleged war criminal.”

Image: David McBride (Sydney Criminal Lawyers)



McBride can receive a sentence of up to 100 years for revealing the cover-up of the great crime of Afghanistan. He tried to exercise his legal right as a whistleblower under the Public Interest Disclosure Act, which the current attorney general, Mark Dreyfus, says “delivers on our promise to strengthen protections for public sector whistleblowers.”

Yet it is Dreyfus, a Labor minister, who signed off on the McBride trial following a punitive wait of four years and eight months since his arrest at Sydney airport: a wait that shredded his health and family.

Those who know David and know of the hideous injustice done to him fill his street in Bondi near the beach in Sydney to wave their encouragement to this good and decent man. To them, and me, he is a hero.

McBride was affronted by what he found in the files he was ordered to inspect. Here was evidence of crimes and their cover-up. He passed hundreds of secret documents to the the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Police raided the ABC’s offices in Sydney while reporters and producers watched, shocked, as their computers were confiscated by the Federal Police.

Attorney-General Dreyfus, self-declared liberal reformer and friend of whistleblowers, has the singular power to stop the McBride trial. A Freedom of Information search of his actions in this direction reveals little, at most, an indifference.

You can’t run a fully-fledged democracy and a colonial war; one aspires to decency, the other is a form of fascism, regardless of its pretensions. Mark the killing fields of Gaza, bombed to dust by apartheid Israel. It is no coincidence that in rich, yet impoverished Britain an “inquiry” is currently being held into the gunning down by British SAS soldiers of 80 Afghans, all civilians, including a couple in bed.

The grotesque injustice meted out to David McBride is minted from the injustice consuming his compatriot, Julian Assange. Both are friends of mine. Whenever I see them, I am optimistic. ‘You cheer me,’ I tell Julian as he raises a defiant fist at the end of our visiting period. ‘You make me feel proud,’ I tell David at our favourite coffee shop in Sydney.

Their bravery has allowed many of us, who might despair, to understand the real meaning of a resistance we all share if we want to prevent the conquest of us, our conscience, our self respect, if we prefer freedom and decency to compliance and collusion. In this, we are all Spartacus.

Spartacus was the rebellious leader of Rome's slaves in 71-73 B.C. There is a thrilling moment in the Kirk Douglas movie *Spartacus* when the Romans call on Spartacus's men to identify their leader and so be pardoned. Instead hundreds of his comrades stand and raise their fists in solidarity and shout, 'I am Spartacus!' The rebellion is under way.

Julian and David are Spartacus. The Palestinians are Spartacus. People who fill the streets with flags and principle and solidarity are Spartacus. We are all Spartacus if we want to be.

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*John Pilger has twice won Britain's highest award for journalism and has been International Reporter of the Year, News Reporter of the Year and Descriptive Writer of the Year. He has made 61 documentary films and has won an Emmy, a BAFTA and the Royal Television Society prize. His Cambodia Year Zero is named as one of the ten most important films of the 20th century. He is the winner of Consortium News' 2023 Gary Webb Award. He can be contacted at [www.johnpilger.com](http://www.johnpilger.com) and on X @johnpilger.*

*CORRECTION: McCarthy was chairman of the [Government Operations Committee](#) and its [Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations](#) of the U.S. Senate.*

*Featured image: Sen. McCarthy, center, confers with Roy Cohn, chief counsel for House Un-American Activities Committee, Aug. 23, 1953. (Los Angeles Times/UCLA Library/Wikimedia Commons)*

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