

Guest speaker presentation to Conference

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There are times when it is hard not to get politically depressed when things become difficult. I know this from my personal experience. If you had known me in the 1980s you'd have thought I was the most unlikely spy. I was a protester, a supporter of the miners, and a member of various pressure organisations.

Then the miners lost, the printers lost at Wapping and the Thatcher government seemed to go on being re-elected whatever happened. I personally started to drift away from the left and of course I joined the intelligence services. And the main reason for joining the service, I was told, was to fight terrorism.

Now I know that terrorism is generally the result of a failure of democracy and diplomacy. The IRA, the main terrorist organisation affecting Britain in the 1980s, was certainly the result a failure of democracy and diplomacy. The political situation today, and fact that people are being bombed today on trains and on buses is the same.

It is not hard to see how these things happen. People in power may believe it's just that some people are evil, but that's not the case of course. People are driven to these things in concrete political economic and social circumstances. As Nelson Mandela said the reason he was forced to become a terrorist was because there was no democratic means to change the system.

And if you look back in northern Ireland, the creation of the modern IRA came about because the Catholic community was being attacked and the police, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, turned a blind eye or in fact joined in. So there was no protection from the rule of law. And when the Catholic community did protect themselves, they were put in prison without trial. And again these kinds of repressive actions do not act to stop terrorism they actually create more of it. Because when innocent people are put in prison without trial, their relatives on the outside see that their democratic rights have been taken away and more of them then take up arms.

Again in northern Ireland, the murder on bloody Sunday of 13 unarmed people, led to more people taking up arms. This is exactly what we are seeing today in places like Kashmir, Palestine and Iraq.

And the invasion of Iraq has led to the increase of recruitment to al-Quaeda and Blair has to bear the diabolical responsibility for that.

Having seen the state from the inside of the intelligence services, I can say they are a blueprint of how not to do it. They are largely drawn from the higher echelons of society, from the public schools, graduated from the Oxbridge colleges. Basically they are not like us, people who have to think about earning a living, applying for jobs and so on, because it's all done through the old boys network.

That leads to a lack of meritocracy where people are promoted simply because they are good chaps who don't rock the boat. The promotion of John Scarlett to Director of MI6 after giving Blair the intelligence he wanted on Iraq, his role in the affair of the secret dossier, shows this. In my view he made a pact with the devil, essentially. He didn't challenge the faulty intelligence that was being used to justify an illegal war;

he kept quiet and in exchange he got the big job. That demonstrates to me exactly how the whole system works.

Our intelligence services fail the test of the rule of law. Until 1989 MI5 was not on a legal footing, but we now have the human rights act which stipulates minimum democratic requirements and that's the first time in history we've had a piece of legislation that does that and we should be using it to challenge the intelligence services.

It says countries do need intelligence services but they must be accountable to elected representatives. But when my elected representative asked certain questions about the operation of the intelligence services those questions were struck off the parliamentary record.

I blew the whistle about an MI6-funded operation by al-Qaeda, an attempt to assassinate Colonel Gaddafi, an operation in which innocent Libyan people were killed and let's face it there can no greater abuse of power than that.

The services are supposed to operate within the law, that is to act with the permission of and be accountable to ministers, who are accountable to parliament which is notionally accountable to us.

But the reality is that there is no system of accountability, that middle- ranking MI6 officers literally had the power of life and death over other people without being held to account at all.

And we should be challenging MI5's investigation of individuals as being illegal in a democracy. I'm sure that many people here have MI5 files – I'm sure I have one myself now, and that is a matter of pride in fact. We should be looking for compensation because obviously MI5 made decisions about whether people got certain jobs, purely based on their membership of entirely legal organisations or because they held certain political views.

If you look at the things I blew the whistle on, it's not hard to see how the state controls governments like new Labour. They held files on people like Jack Straw and Robin Cook and if the state has private information on government ministers they can use these to imply, or even to blackmail them to play ball.

There is a suggestion that while Blair opposed my disclosures, Jack Straw actually supported investigating them. And it was shortly after that the Daily Mirror ran a sting operation engaging Jack Straw's son in an accusation that he sold drugs. After that Jack Straw had no interest in hearing my information. And this is the kind of thing that goes on behind the scenes all the time, and when you scratch the surface you realise that you don't live in a democracy at all.

We don't even have the basis of a democracy – we don't have a written constitution, we don't have a supreme court, our second chamber was up until recently hereditary and then we replaced it with a system that is even worse. At least hereditary peers occasionally had an independent thought in their heads, whilst now we have a bunch of placemen sent there to do the government's bidding.

These are all issues that make it difficult for people in this country to protest successfully. Our failure in the past has perhaps been not to understand the nature of power. Many revolutions of the past, the American and the French revolutions for example, were fought over issues of constitutions and rights and how these can be

enshrined so that nobody can take them away. In Britain we have never had those rights, never had a written constitution.

And as we saw with the war in Iraq that made it easy for false intelligence produced in our country to be used by other countries. The American intelligence services were saying that there was no intelligence justification that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, but the Bush government used our intelligence to justify the war.

And who gains from all this, of course? The arms industry gains from it, the oil industry. If you are looking at a strategy to change planet earth, surely one of the main planks of it must be a policy that the arms industry, the oil industry, the pharmaceuticals industry should be nationalised across the planet so that they wouldn't be run on a profit basis. They wouldn't be the cause of wars to control oil, passing on violence to the next generation leading to more arms sales.

In this country we don't have a nuclear deterrent, we have one that is entirely controlled by the Americans and purchased from them. The US gives Israel \$3bn a year in aid, even though they are illegally occupying another country, and again much of that is in turn spent in the US arms industry.

Until we tackle these issues we will be fighting with one arm tied behind our backs.

But I believe we can see a silver lining in some recent events. To have 2 million people on the streets of London protesting about anything is unprecedented; it was a landmark. And when these things happen we can see that a new generation is coming through that is ready to do things.

Another thing working in our favour is the economic situation, which is changing so dramatically with the decline of oil stocks. Without oil one asks oneself how the capitalist society can be maintained. And the only way it will be maintained is by the transformation of society to other forms of energy.

So people are aware, they are not stupid, despite what their governments may think. In the next few years people are going to face even greater problems, the loss of their jobs, the loss of their homes and they will protest in ever greater numbers. And we have to be there to ensure that protest doesn't turn to violence but is challenged to change this country and change the world, so that the planet can have a stable democracy in this new century.

I'm not here to despair, as I said, and I'd like to finish with something that Edmund Burke said, something which has motivated me, which is: "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." So let's all do something.