

October 1, 2008

Censorship and Freedom of Speech

This is the key section from my new book which the publisher is unwilling to publish due to legal threats from Schillings libel lawyers, acting on behalf of the mercenary commander Tim Spicer:

" Peter Penfold was back in the UK. He was interviewed separately. Both Penfold and Spicer were interviewed under caution, as suspects for having broken the arms embargo.

Then, suddenly, Tony Blair intervened. On 11 May 1998, without consulting the FCO, he gave a statement to journalists. Penfold, Blair declared, was "a hero". A dictatorship had been successfully overthrown and democracy restored. Penfold had "Done a superb job in trying to deal with the consequences of the military coup." All this stuff about Security Council Resolutions and sanctions was "an overblown hoo-ha".

I believe this episode is extremely important. In 1998 the country was still starry-eyed about Blair, but with the benefit of hindsight, this intervention points the way towards the disasters of his later years in office. It is extraordinarily wrong for a Prime Minister to declare that a man is a hero, when Customs had questioned him two days earlier under caution over the very matter the Prime Minister is praising. It shows Blair's belief that his judgement stood above the law of the land, something that was to occur again on a much bigger scale when he halted the Serious Fraud Office investigation into British Aerospace's foreign bribes. But of course Blair's contempt for UN security council resolutions on the arms embargo, and the belief that installing democracy by invasion could trump the trivia of international law, prefigures precisely the disaster of Iraq. As with Iraq, Blair was also conveniently ignoring the fact that Sierra Leone was left a mess, with Kabbah in charge of little more than Freetown.

In the FCO we were astonished by Blair's intervention, and deeply puzzled. Where had it come from? It differed completely from Robin Cook's views. Who was drafting this stuff for Blair to the effect that the UN and the law were unimportant? For most of us, this was the very first indication we had of how deep a hold neo-con thinking and military interests had on the Blair circle. It was also my first encounter with the phenomenon of foreign policy being dictated by Alistair Campbell, the Prime Minister's Press Secretary, The military lobby, of course, was working hard to defend Spicer, one of their own.

A few days later Customs and Excise concluded their investigations. A thick dossier, including documentation from the FCO, from the raid on Sandline's offices, and from elsewhere, was sent to the Crown Prosecution Service. The Customs and Excise team who had interviewed us told me that the recommendation was that both Spicer and Penfold be prosecuted for breach of the embargo. The dossier was returned to Customs and Excise from the Crown Prosecution Service the very same day it was sent. It was marked, in effect, for no further action. There would be no prosecution. A customs officer told me bitterly that, given the time between the dossier leaving their offices and the time it was returned, allowing time for both deliveries, it could not have been in the CPS more than half an hour. It was a thick dossier. They could not even have read it before turning it down.

I felt sick to my stomach at the decision not to prosecute Spicer and Penfold. So were the customs officers investigating the case; at least two of them called me to commiserate. They had believed they had put together an extremely strong case, and they told me that their submission to the Crown Prosecution Service said so.

The decision not to prosecute in the Sandline case was the first major instance of the corruption of the legal process that was to be a hallmark of the Blair years. Customs and Excise were stunned by it. There is no doubt whatsoever that Spicer and Penfold had worked together to ship weapons to Sierra Leone in breach of UK law. Security Council 1132 had been given effect in British law by an Order in Council. I had never found in the least credible their assertions that they did not know about it. I had personally told Spicer that it would be illegal to ship arms to Sierra Leone, to any side in the conflict. Penfold's claim never to have seen an absolutely key Security Council Resolution about a country to which he was High Commissioner is truly extraordinary.

But even if they did not know, ignorance of the law is famously no defence in England. Who knows what a jury would have made of this sorry tale of greed, hired killers and blood diamonds. But I have no doubt at all – and more importantly nor did the customs officers investigating the case – that there was enough there for a viable prosecution.

The head of the Crown Prosecution Service when it decided not to prosecute was Barbara Mills. Barbara Mills is a very well-connected woman in New Labour circles. She is married to John Mills, a former Labour councillor in Camden. That makes her sister-in-law to Tessa Jowell, the New Labour cabinet minister with a penchant for taking out repeated mortgages on her home, and then paying them off with

cash widely alleged to have come from Silvio Berlusconi, the friend and business colleague of her husband David Mills, who according to a BBC documentary by the estimable John Sweeney has created offshore companies for known Camorra and Mafia interests. Tessa Jowell and David Mills were also both Camden Labour Councillors, and are close to Tony Blair. Blair is also a great friend of Berlusconi, despite the numerous criminal allegations against Berlusconi and his long history of political alliances with open fascists. Just to complete the cosy New Labour picture, another brother-in-law of Barbara Mills and Tessa Jowell is Alan Rusbridger, editor of the Guardian.

Did any of those relationships of Barbara Mills, the Director of Public Prosecutions, affect the Crown Prosecution Service's decision not to proceed with the case, and to take that decision in less time than it would have taken them to read the dossier Customs and Excise sent them?

Barbara Mills was to resign as Director of Public Prosecutions later that year after being personally criticised in his judgement by a High Court judge who ruled against the Crown Prosecution Service for continually failing to prosecute over deaths in police custody. That has not stopped the extremely well connected Dame Barbara from being appointed to a string of highly paid public positions since then. "

It is infuriating that, Maxwell style, Spicer (who has made millions from the war in Iraq) is using the prohibitive costs of defending a libel case to intimidate my publisher. The result is that important information I received at first hand, and an account of events to which I am eye-witness, is being repressed, as is an important independent critique of early Blair foreign policy.

I am not currently confident the book will get published at all - I am not prepared to put out anodyne pap, which hides the truth, under my name.