

THE [OTHER] WAR

“A powerful and illuminating read. ‘The [Other] War’ is an important contribution to the discourse on Islamophobia and its sociopolitical implications in Britain.”

—Tahir Abbas, Professor of Radicalisation Studies,
author of *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure*

“...engagingly written and compellingly argued.”

— Arun Kundnani, author of *The Muslims Are Coming!
Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror*

About the Author

Michael Barker is a trade unionist and works as a support worker in a college in the United Kingdom. He is also an Assistant Secretary to the Leicester & District Trades Union Council. Michael is the author of six books: *The Occult Elite: Anti-Communist Paranoia and Other Ruling-Class Delusions* (2022); *The Givers That Take* (2021); *Lockdown Leicester: Notes From a Pandemic* (2020); *Under the Mask of Philanthropy* (2017); *Fighting For Our Future: Ongoing Struggles Against Big Business and New Labour* (2016); and *Letters to Mercury: The Socialist Fightback in Leicester* (2015). In his spare time Michael writes about local and international issues for a variety of publications. He is a member of Socialist Alternative.

THE [OTHER] WAR:
THE DEMONISATION OF
BRITISH MUSLIMS

Michael Barker

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For Caroline.

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Introduction

The world is in turmoil, and it is the working class who are being made to pay with our lives for the ongoing crises of capitalism. The question of barbarism or socialism is therefore once again starkly posed. And, as ever, the looming threat posed by barbarism can only be avoided if we refuse to accept the dictates of our exploiters and unite to fight for the socialist transformation of society. Only by taking such action can we ensure that ordinary people are positioned to democratically decide our own future.

Ensuring that our classes democratic organisations can lead this struggle has always been a work-in-progress; and there is no question that a lot of work still needs to be done to turn the trade union movement into a powerful and effective tool for liberating our class. But with the involvement of millions of trade union members our unions can play a critical role in challenging capitalist exploitation and in posing the need for a socialist alternative to capitalism.

Throughout British history, socialists have stood proudly at the forefront of struggles for justice. But the political elites' and the billionaire classes lust for profiteering means that those in power would rather ignore such reasonable demands if only to escalate their ongoing plunder of societies collective wealth. This helps explain why the corporate press, which is largely owned by the ruling class, has been so keen (as always) to demonise and misrepresent the views of

those who have been willing to forcefully challenge the bankrupt status quo.

With global political and economic mayhem leading to planet-wide death and destruction, increasing numbers of people are becoming convinced that there should be no going back to the old normal. But what is the alternative? Socialists say we need to step up our campaigning for a democratic and socialist future; but with the parlous state of Britain's labour movement combined with a corporate-own media system that exists to perpetuate the needs of capitalism, such emancipatory solutions are not always apparent to huge swathes of society. Labour mis-leaders like Sir Keir Starmer, working together with the mainstream media, thus continue to try to throw dirt into the eyes of ordinary people.

In recent years such efforts to promote mass confusion were of course most clear when, in 2015, a socialist was finally elected leader of the Labour Party. This led to all parts of the labour and corporate media establishment embarking upon one of the most vicious smear campaigns in history - which most notably wrongfully accused Jeremy Corbyn of being an anti-Semite.¹

So, with pro-capitalist politicians misleading most of the mainstream political parties across the world - all being united in their refusal to represent the needs of ordinary people as opposed to the needs of big business and corporations - people seeking out some clarity in their lives have been forced to turn elsewhere in their search for answers. And with the assistance of the internet, not to mention Facebook's repulsive algorithms - which have actively marketed information to people who ask questions like "how to burn Jews" - it is sadly becoming easier for people to get absorbed in the type of all-encompassing conspiracies promoted by the far-right than to get involved in the fight for socialism. Indeed, rather than popularise the type of ideas that might help people gain control of their lives; the corporate media (whether right-wing or liberal) continue to provide a breeding ground that allows divisive political conspiracies to flourish.²

¹ For just one example of such serial misreporting, see my blog post, "The hate factory vs Jeremy Corbyn.," *Thoughts of a Leicester Socialist*, April 2, 2018.

² Michael Barker, "Combatting surveillance capitalism: an Orwellian lesson

The relentless ‘othering’ of the Muslim community by politicians and media commentators thus plays a central role in fuelling the growth of the types of conspiracies that threaten the future of democracy - a point which has been made many times before. For instance, in his book *Countering Violent Extremism: The International Deradicalization Agenda* (2021) Professor Tahir Abbas explained: “It is now increasingly apparent that an anti-Muslim outlook plays a part in radicalizing far-right extremists.”

Populism, nativism and ethnic nationalism go hand-in-hand as a ruse to mask the failures of domestic policy and the ongoing interventions in faraway lands in pursuit of some greater foreign policy objective that routinely leads to catastrophe and destabilisation in those spaces as the norm. In the pursuit of attention-grabbing headlines, sensationalist messaging presented as newsworthy due to the bold ideological motivations of certain press barons on the right of the political spectrum, Islam and Muslims are demonized on such an extensive basis that for it to be Islamophobic is for it to be normal. It takes a critical perspective to distance oneself from the utterances of politicians and some media outlets, but for the less thinking individual, such words are seen as truth.³

In times of global crisis, it is therefore more important than ever to question the established truths that serve the interests of the powerful.

We are all aware of the growing death toll that has resulted from our government’s so-called “War on Terror,” but the vile demonisation of the Muslim community that has always remained central to waging this war on the home front – *The [Other] War* –

in history from Ford to Google,” *CounterPunch*, July 26, 2019. My last book examined the way in which elites weaponise conspiracy theories against the working-class, see *The Occult Elite: Anti-Communist Paranoia and Other Ruling-Class Delusions* (2022).

³ Abbas, *Countering Violent Extremism*, p.80, pp.151-2. For two other introductions to this subject, see Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (2021); and Suhaimah Manzoor-Khan, *Tangled in Terror: Uprooting Islamophobia* (2022).

must be firmly rejected. The genocidal violence that is currently being inflicted upon Palestinian people gives further urgency to undertaking this democratic task. And I hope that my book can contribute to ordinary people overcoming the barriers to building the types of mass movements and street protests that will force our government to act to not only end the bloodbath in Gaza but also bring about an end to all wars.

As a revolutionary Marxist and a member of Socialist Alternative, I am first and foremost an internationalist. By this I mean that I believe that the entire world community – excluding only the ruling-class (i.e., those who profit from exploiting the working class) – must strive to work together across all borders to inaugurate a democratic and socialist world free from oppression and exploitation. This is the larger task that lies ahead of us all, and it is a vision that continues to inspire ordinary people to unite in the fight for a better world.⁴

In the meantime, I like many other socialists continue to be engaged in local struggles for justice. And one of the reasons I found myself writing this book in the first place, is because as a school worker and trade unionist, I have been involved in the ongoing efforts to expose the way in which our government have demonised Muslims through their despised PREVENT counter terrorism programme. Professor Abbas puts it simply when he summarises the nature of this government programme.

‘PREVENT’, which has been the outward-facing component of the UK government’s counter-extremism strategy since 2006, conflates legitimate political resistance among young British Muslims with indications of [violent extremism], providing credence to the argument that ‘PREVENT’ is a form of social control, mollifying resistance by re-affirming the status quo on domestic and foreign policy. In this vicious circle, ‘PREVENT’ adds to structural and cultural Islamophobia, which are amplifiers of both Islamist and far-right radicalization.

⁴ Hannah Sell, *Socialism in the Twenty First Century: The Way Forward for Anti-Capitalism* (2002); Tony Wilsdon and Alicia Salvadeo, “A socialist world is possible: what is socialism, and how could we win it?,” *Socialist Alternative*, March 31, 2022.

‘Safeguarding’ vulnerable young people is imperative in this social policy, but the language of inclusion is absent.⁵

Like Professor Abbas himself, many authors have written excellent educative materials debunking PREVENT, and trade unionists (including myself) continue to campaign for the programme to be scrapped. Yet the PREVENT programme still thrives and divides our communities. Thus, it was partly out of frustration with the latest PREVENT ‘training’ that I was compelled to undertake at my workplace that I felt *compelled* to write this book.

Since its launch in 2006, PREVENT has focused the British public’s attention on the ostensible threat posed by Muslims to democracy. In doing so it has contributed towards creating a climate of fear that has proved essential to sustaining the ruling classes Global War on Terror. But despite the UK government’s overwhelming focus on Muslim suspects, in the last year for which there is data, “Islamist concerns” only made up approximately one sixth of all PREVENT referrals. Thus, contrary to popular belief, the primary threat lies elsewhere. As the British government’s own report on this data explains:

The category ‘Vulnerability present but no ideology or [counter terrorism] risk’ accounted for the largest proportion of referrals (2,127; 33%) in the year ending March 2022. For the second year running, the number of referrals for Extreme Right-Wing radicalisation concerns (1,309; 20%) is greater than referrals for Islamist concerns (1,027; 16%).

The growing threat posed by the far-right is something that socialists have warned about for years, and yet even now the political establishment continues to encourage the further growth of such threatening and extremist views. As Professor Abbas warned in his book:

Islamophobia grows when political actors seek to gain capital from their contempt. Sentiments from US President Donald

⁵ Abbas, *Countering Violent Extremism*, p.105.

Trump, which inspired the ‘send her back’ chant about a critical Muslim congresswoman, Ilhan Omar, created huge damage, as did UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s suggestion that Muslim women donning the niqab look like ‘letterboxes or bank robbers’. Such views embolden elements of the far right, who come to believe that their perspectives have legitimacy. These groups grow due to the same set of structural challenges encountered by British Muslims but also because of the message they hear in the media and politics. In a climate of fear, hostility and intolerance reinforced by polarising politics and economics, there is a process of reciprocal radicalization, boosted by nativism. It has the effect of normalising Islamophobic attacks, which are predominantly directed towards visible Muslim women. The high rates of unemployment, poor health, limited housing and relative educational underachievement faced by many are ignored. The fact that half of British Muslims live in the poorest 20 per cent of areas in the country is disregarded. Structural disadvantage and direct and indirect racism normalised through austerity and Islamophobia are significant social issues that receive scant attention.⁶

In undertaking my mandatory PREVENT training, it also came to my attention that a factor that is steadfastly ignored when it comes to warnings about terrorism, relates to those offences recorded in Northern Ireland. Having a familiarity with this largely overlooked information is however vital for anyone interested in trying to understand the real scale of the Islamist threat. And while government data that compares all UK nations is not easily available, information comparing total arrests made for terrorism-related offences is available for 2020. Here the government surmise:

In terms of the United Kingdom as a whole, once again Northern Ireland-related terrorism was responsible for the vast majority of ideological violence in the United Kingdom. Of the 62 terrorist incidents reported to Europol in 2020, 56 were ‘security-related incidents’ in Northern Ireland. Unlike terrorism in Great Britain [where there were 3 terrorist

⁶ Abbas, *Countering Violent Extremism*, pp.157-8.

incidents, all representing incidents of Islamist terrorism], ideological violence in Northern Ireland continues to be perpetrated with munitions and explosives: the 56 incidents included 39 shootings and 17 bombings.⁷

The government report adds that in Northern Ireland, in 2020, “there were a total of 79 arrests made under section 41 of the Terrorism Act 2000,” while by comparison in Great Britain, there were 26 arrests. It of course remains the case that the government should do whatever it can to minimise the threat posed by terrorist actors, but the government must not engage in fearmongering about the threat posed by Muslims or by Christians. This is an important point because the number of people dying owing to terrorist acts in the UK is extremely low, especially when compared to past decades. This point is well-illustrated by the following graph that was presented in a recent government report.⁸

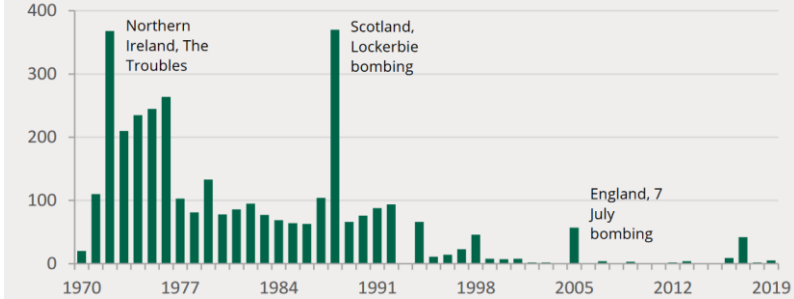
⁷ The government report highlights that no incidents of Islamist terrorism took place in Northern Ireland. This leads them to explain that “The principal terrorist threat in Northern Ireland emanates from two groups - the new IRA (nIRA) and the Continuity IRA (CIRA).” They continue: “The attack methodologies of CIRA and nIRA mostly involved firearms or small improvised explosive devices, such as pipe bombs. However, larger and more destructive devices such as vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices and explosively formed projectiles were also deployed in the year under review.”

For a useful discussion of how Muslims living in Northern Ireland reacted to 9/11, see Gabriele Marranci, “Pakistanis in Northern Ireland in the aftermath of September 11,” in: Tahir Abbas (ed.), *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure* (2005).

⁸ The graph is reproduced from Grahame Allen, Matthew Burton, and Alison Pratt, “Terrorism in Great Britain: the statistics,” House of Commons, July 19, 2022, p.7.

Deaths due to terrorism in the UK

including perpetrators, 1970-2019



Taking my starting point from the British government's refusal to deal with either the root causes or the current threat posed by Islamic terrorism, PART ONE of *The [Other] War* outlines how the British state responded to the Irish terror threat known as the Troubles (which began in 1969). It examines this history to demonstrate how the same failure to deal with the Troubles in a democratic and just manner were replicated in the British state's dealings with Islamic terrorism. Capitalist priorities relating to the maintenance of lucrative international capital flows therefore trumped the need to prioritise the safeguarding of human life.

Drawing on the British government's complicated relationship with the radical Islamist preacher Abu Hamza, the first part of *The [Other] War* then sheds light on the state's hypocrisy when it came to dealing with terrorism. Indeed, it is apparent that the same process of injustice that held true throughout the Troubles has now been inflicted upon innocent Muslims who have been swept up in a discriminatory dragnet that perpetuates the Global War on Terror. In discussing this global war, this section of the book also, in part, scrutinises the US government's role in manufacturing a fictitious and highly profitable "war" against Islam. One way the book does this is by tracing the US government's intriguing relationship with Anwar al-Awlaki, which culminated in his illegal assassination. Following the case of Awlaki provides a useful means of exposing how capitalist power is exerted in the modern world – a world whose surreal outlines are defined by torture and the persecution of secret wars.

Informed by my employment as a school support worker, **PART TWO** revisits the infamous Trojan Horse affair of 2014 – an affair that revolved around a fictitious Muslim plot to radicalise Birmingham’s schools. This affair was a moral panic of immense dimensions, one that was concocted by the Conservative government, who, working hand-in-glove with Labour Party politicians and the mainstream media, whipped up an Islamophobic firestorm whose consequences are still felt today. This affair was then used to justify the demonisation of all Muslims as the enemies within. It also enabled the government to justify the increased surveillance of Muslims, including Muslim youth, which it did by enacting a statutory duty on public sector workers to participate in their **PREVENT** programme.

Much has of course already been written about the Trojan Horse affair, so the essay presented in **PART TWO** of this book sets out to achieve the modest task of synthesising the already existing analyses. It does this to help clarify how this toxic affair, centred around a hoax letter, was utilised to intensify the persecution of all Muslims as a new suspect community. In restating the major details of this affair and the lessons that can be learned from it, it is hoped that the working class will be better equipped to overcome the application of such divide-and-rule tactics in the future.

In the closing section of **PART TWO**, I examine how the later school protests opposing **LBGTQ+** related curriculum that reverberated throughout Birmingham’s Muslim communities in 2019 should be understood as just another form of victim blaming. The government’s longstanding efforts to malign Muslims as would-be-terrorists is now being applied to the **LBGTQ+** community, with conservatives pushing a new moral panic that scapegoats yet another minority for all the ills inflicted upon ordinary people by capitalism.

PART THREE of *The [Other] War* takes a different approach to the two preceding parts of this book. In this concluding section I reproduce a series of shorter articles that were published on my blog (Thoughts of a Leicester Socialist) between July 2015 and February 2024, some of which featured on the letters page in my city’s local newspaper. These essays cover a variety of subjects and were written as quick political responses to various incidents of Islamophobia. For

example, in the context of criticising PREVENT, the first essay highlights the political extremism of the programme's main supporters within the political establishment, while the following essay draws upon Professor Arun Kundnani's useful 2009 report *Spooked: How Not to Prevent Violent Extremism* to spotlight how PREVENT victimised Muslims in the part of the England where I live, the East Midlands. Later essays throw a spotlight on the preachers of hate who own the most influential corporations that dominate the mainstream media, and other contributions outline how the people of Leicester helped clear our city's streets of the racism of other genuine preachers of hate, in this case the so-called Christian patriots of Britain First.

Given my role as a trade unionist based in a school, many of the essays in this section of the book engage critically with the PREVENT programme and rebut the disinformation that was promoted by one of its lead practitioners. In the same vein, I have reproduced my criticisms of Sara Khan's confused book which had the ambitious and progressive-sounding title *The Battle for British Islam: Reclaiming Muslim Identity from Extremism* (2016). While other essays focus on the vital issue of how the working-class can unite and organise to oppose populist far-right demagogues coming to power all over the world. *The [Other] War* then closes with a series of articles I wrote as an attempt to understand dangers posed by an outbreak of communal violence on Leicester's streets in 2022.

It is hoped that the lessons told in this book will help activists develop more politically effective organising strategies to fight oppression. Afterall, we need to create societal structures anew, in ways that eliminate all forms of exploitation, and bring an end to terrorism and warmongering. No one has ever pretended that this will be easy. Global elites repeat *ad Infinitum* that there is no alternative to their preferred capitalist system - a bankrupt political and economic schema that asserts the dominion of profit-making over all other human priorities. And they attempt to justify this lie by asserting that their capitalist system is the best fit for harnessing humanities true biological inclinations, which they characterise as being dominated by aggression. But they are wrong.⁹ Just as they are wrong that the global

⁹ Rutger Bregman's book *Humankind: A Hopeful History* (2020) provides a

working class has ever accepted exploitation as a fact of life. It is true that we remain ensnared by economic and ideological chains that hold back our collective emancipation, but these chains can and must be broken. We will organise; we must organise. We have a socialist world to win!

fresh look at ways of overcoming the daily violence of capitalisms pessimistic and ill-informed view of human nature. However, this important text still had some serious limitations which I addressed in my review, “Why kindness is not enough,” *CounterPunch*, April 2, 2021.

ONE

Resisting Terror

Revolutionary socialists stand for the building of democratic mass movements of people to organise against, and ultimately overturn, the corrupt political establishment. This task is necessary so we can collectively replace the capitalist status quo with a socialist alternative which is dedicated to meeting the needs of ordinary people not those of big business.¹ At the same time socialists stand firmly opposed to all forms of terrorism, whether it be the sort routinely carried out by capitalist states or that undertaken out by smaller groups fighting to promote their own particular interests. Socialists of course understand why political frustration might drive smaller non-state groups to embrace terrorist methods, but it remains the case that we oppose the adoption of such ultimately futile tactics.

Writing over a century ago, one famous revolutionary who was organising against the despotic regime of the Russian Tzar, attacked the enthusiasm with which other so-called revolutionaries maintained for “the explosive force of nitro-glycerin”. He observed that the types of groups that adopted the tactics of terrorism did so because they were unable to appreciate the full historical significance of the active role that had been fulfilled by ordinary peoples in shaping society.

¹ Kenneth Lapides (ed.), *Marx and Engels on the Trade Unions* (1987).

“Engendered by the absence of a revolutionary class, regenerated later by a lack of confidence in the revolutionary masses,” the same revolutionary correctly warned, “terrorism can maintain itself only by exploiting the weakness and disorganisation of the masses, minimising their conquests, and exaggerating their defeats.” Adoption of terrorist tactics therefore acted to disorganise the forces of resistance, not organise them. Terrorist actions only serving to undermine the development of the type of mass socialist struggle that is necessary to wrest control of society from the hands of our oppressors. “By its very essence terrorist work...totally excludes agitational and organisational work among the masses.”²

But we should be clear that capitalist leaders have different priorities from those of ordinary people. Members of this ravenous billionaire-class have no qualms in deploying state-backed terror to limit the democratic aspirations of humanity. This section of the book therefore outlines some of the anti-democratic means by which the British state have responded to the threat posed by oppositional terrorist actors, running from the outbreak of the Northern Ireland Troubles many decades ago, through to the present-day oppression of Muslims. In doing so this section will illustrate how terrorist resistance to the British state and its American counterpart has led to repressive government actions that only served to encourage recruitment to the ranks of anti-state terrorists while eroding the basic democratic rights that had been previously won by organised workers.

Mistaken Lessons from Ireland

When the Troubles began in 1969 the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland had already faced decades of extreme hardship at the hands of the British state. Colonial mis-rulers had whipped up sectarian rivalries by backing the Protestant majority against the Catholic community in a classic case of divide-and-rule. This vile strategy of splitting communities along religious lines saw to it that the entire working class suffered. By the 1960s, however, sectarian divisions were widely thought to be on the decline amongst ordinary people, if not among their leaders, and as such the “main tendency... was toward

² Leon Trotsky, “The bankruptcy of individual terrorism” (1909).

greater integration of the two communities.”³ As socialist activist Peter Hadden explained in his 1994 pamphlet *Beyond the Troubles?*:

This meant a falling away of support for the extremes of unionism and nationalism. The IRA’s border campaign was met with indifference in the Catholic working class areas of Belfast and Derry. When it ended, the IRA no longer existed as a force. The remnants of the organisation shifted to the left, influenced by the Communist Party, and concluded correctly that such military campaigns could not succeed. In the unionist camp the Reverend Ian Paisley began his evangelical and political crusade in these years, campaigning on such issues as the ‘Romeward’ trend of the Protestant Church of Ireland. Most Protestants saw him as a crank.

Inspired by the mass revolts then convulsing working class communities in the United States, on August 24, 1968, the first civil rights march was organised by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) – in a march which served to unite Catholics and Protestants in their demands for justice. Political pressure applied on behalf of the government was used to ensure that this march was cancelled, but such blatant attempts at sabotage failed, and the action still took place. Nevertheless, it remained the case that subsequent marches faced fierce government repression. The open violence that was directed by the state against the protestors however only had the effect of helping the rebellion grow, with a demonstration in Derry held in mid-November attracting around 15,000 people onto the streets. Critically, at this time socialists had argued for the adoption of tactics that could incorporate working class Protestant communities into this new civil rights movement, but tragically such an approach was rejected by moderate Catholics like John Hume who quickly seized control of the movement. “The NICRA Executive, heavily influenced by members of the Communist Party which was arguing for a broad anti-unionist struggle of all classes [i.e. Catholic unity], echoed the position of Hume.”

With the ‘moderate’ leaders of the civil rights movement

³ Hadden, *Beyond the Troubles?*, p.22.

proving unwilling to unite the working class across sectarian divisions, tensions between Catholic and Protestants now intensified. Divisions which were then deliberately stoked by the British state and by the counterprotests organised by Paisley's 'Ulster Protestant Volunteers.' Hence with the ongoing failures of local political elites' to unite the population, sectarian violence only deepened in the coming years; as born out the three-day Battle of Bogside (which began on August 12, 1969), the arrival of the British Army (which was strongly opposed by socialists), and by the fighting that broke out between Catholics and the Army in the Ballymurphy area of West Belfast (starting on April 1, 1970). Not long after these events, the anti-Marxist forces of the newly minted Provisional IRA launched their now infamous campaign of terrorism.

The British government responded to the Provisional IRA's terrorism with massive repression and internment without trial. This meant that between August 1971 and December 1975 nearly 2,000 people were interned, the vast majority of whom were nationalists. This flagrant removal of all due process only inflamed resistance within the Catholic community⁴. Socialist historian, John Newsinger, observed in his book *British Counterinsurgency: From Palestine to Northern Ireland* (2002):

Whereas in the four months before internment four soldiers and four civilians had been killed, in the four months after 30 soldiers, eleven policemen and members of the Ulster

⁴ On 4 December 1971, members of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) had exploded a bomb at McGurk's Bar in North Belfast which killed 15 people. "The unionist government [then] used the bombing to justify the recent (utterly disastrous) introduction of internment, in which no loyalists had been arrested." At the time the government had falsely "attributed blame" for this bombing "to the IRA, saying the massacre was an 'own goal' resulting from a premature explosion." This was in spite of contradictory evidence which included the fact that the UVF had claimed responsibility for the massacre. McGovern, *Counterinsurgency and Collusion in Northern Ireland*, p.21. For a discussion of the legacy of internment, see Laurence McKeown, *Out of Time, Irish Republican Prisoners Long Kesh 1972-2000* (2001); and Clarke Jones, "Are prisons really schools for terrorism? Challenging the rhetoric on prison radicalization," *Punishment & Society*, 16(1), 2014.

Defence Regiment (UDR), and 73 civilians were killed. The conflict escalated out of control. Internment, according to one commentator, had blown away ‘the last shreds of support for the army within the Catholic population, uniting the whole community in angry solidarity with “the men behind the wire”’.

“...The disastrous consequences of internment were compounded when it became known that a group of internees had been singled out and subjected to in-depth interrogation techniques. The techniques had been approved for use in earlier colonial conflicts, but in Northern Ireland their use was a propaganda disaster, further alienating the Catholic minority and seriously damaging the British government’s international standing. (p.165)

Terror Pundits

At the time, right-wing commentators rejected this type of socialist analysis, with an important example being provided by Britain’s then leading terrorism expert, Paul Wilkinson – an individual who remains influential today. In his 1977 book, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, Wilkinson boldly stated, “I cannot accept that the abandonment of internment was other than an act of incredible folly, a self-inflicted wound on the part of the civil authorities.”⁵ Some decades later, commonsense forced this so-called expert to do an about face, and Wilkinson now (correctly) used internment as an illustration of how repressive emergency measures “play into the hands of terrorists and, if prolonged, become totally counterproductive.” Belatedly he acknowledged:

The use of internment in 1971 provided a powerful recruiting sergeant for the IRA. It convinced many Catholics that repression and discrimination against the minority community had to be resisted. Terrorist violence greatly increased following the introduction of internment, and the total number of deaths from terrorism in Northern Ireland in 1972

⁵ Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, p.156.

(467) is the highest ever. Political and funding support for the IRA in America greatly increased. Another serious consequence of internment is that the process injects a fresh cohort of extremely bitter and also better-trained and determined people into the ranks of the terrorist organisation. Internment became a kind of 'Staff College' for terrorists.⁶

Here it is worth dwelling on the fact that in his 1977 text Wilkinson had, in an extremely distorted way, also showcased the critical role fulfilled by the strike actions of workers in orchestrating positive political change. Although discussed in a section of his book titled "Terrorist strategy and tactics," he nevertheless recognised the historic role played by mass insurrections in revolutionary movements. He wrote:

It is sometimes assumed that this method had its day in 1917 Russia but is now obsolete. Recent events in Portugal have changed this perception, for it is clear that, in a situation where the armed forces can no longer be relied upon by the authorities, the politics of the streets may still prove decisive in toppling a regime. The more highly urbanised and industrialised the state concerned the greater the potential of mass action by the working class. For again, provided that the armed forces remain neutral or hostile to the government, the industrial workers will find it a relatively simple matter to bring down the government. The major weapon of the workers in such a situation is the withdrawal of their labour. A prolonged and solid general strike can utterly paralyse any liberal democratic regime and enforce major concessions or abject capitulation by the government, as witness the effects of the Ulster Workers' Council strike in 1974 which caused the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive. (pp.108-9)

Socialists disagree with Wilkinson's assertion that it is easy to bring down a government, as it is not even easy to win a strike in a single workplace, as both rely upon a lot of hard work on the part of socialist

⁶ Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response* 3rd Edition (2011, [2001]), p.95.

organisers.⁷ That said, Wilkinson is right to highlight how mass insurrections did bring down the Tzar's regime in Russia (in 1917) and did succeed in ending the brutal dictatorship that had existed in Portugal for fifty years (with a revolution succeeding in 1974). But it is important to note that Wilkinson's example of the Ulster Workers' Council strike was not really a strike, as in reality it was a reactionary loyalist led work stoppage – albeit one that illustrated where power lies in society, that is, in the hands of workers.⁸ As in his earlier misunderstanding of the implications of internment, it took many years before Wilkinson came to acknowledge the obvious fact that it was “loyalist paramilitaries who organised and enforced the Ulster Workers' Council strike.”⁹ The so-called general strike therefore represented yet another example of how local paramilitary forces had maintained a cosy working relationship with intelligence agents working for the British state – a troubling history that is scrutinised in Professor Mark McGovern's book *Counterinsurgency and Collusion in Northern Ireland* (2019).¹⁰ On the history of this troubling relationship, McGovern surmises:

⁷ Tom Barker, *How Workers Can Win: Lessons From the Strike Victory at Ash Field Academy* (2024).

⁸ As Peter Hadden observed, at the time supporters of the Militant (which is the forerunner of Socialist Alternative) “opposed [the Ulster Workers' Council] stoppage which struck terror into the Catholic community, further divided the working class, strengthened the position of sectarians in the workplaces, and weakened the trade union movement. Nonetheless although carried out in a distorted and reactionary manner, the UWC stoppage had shown the power of the working class. It had demonstrated the superiority of mass struggle over the, by comparison, feeble methods of the Provisionals.” (*Beyond the Troubles?*)

⁹ Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy*, p.71.

¹⁰ Documentaries exploring the issue of state collusion with loyalist forces include BBC Panorama's *A Licence to Murder* (2002), Panorama's *Britain's Secret Terror Deals* (2015), and RTÉ Television's feature-length documentary *Collusion* (2015). For a more detailed examination of how state terror operates across the world (including in Northern Ireland), see Jeffrey Sluka's *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror* (1999).

Despite considerable failings, a 2012 report by Sir Desmond de Silva into the loyalist killing of human rights lawyer Pat Finucane in 1989 confirmed collusion between British military intelligence and RUC [Royal Ulster Constabulary] Special Branch with loyalist paramilitaries during the conflict in Northern Ireland was widespread, institutionalised and strategic in nature. Long suspected, the true scale still came as a shock – not least that 85 per cent of all intelligence held by loyalists in the late 1980s, which was used to plan their escalating campaign, originated from state intelligence sources. At the centre of these activities, pivotal in disseminating this tsunami of state-sourced information, was Brian Nelson. At that time Nelson was the chief intelligence officer of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA). He was also a British Army agent working for the key British Army intelligence unit operating in the North, the Force Research Unit (FRU). Nelson, said de Silva, passed on intelligence to better target ‘republican personalities’ at the instigation and behest of his FRU handlers. The FRU, MI5 and Nelson were also intimately involved in the importation of a large cache of weapons into Northern Ireland in late 1987 that greatly facilitated the upsurge in loyalist killing and assassination that was to follow. So much so that by 1993 (for the first time in decades), loyalists were responsible for more killings in the North than anyone else, including the IRA. Discussions within the highest government, military, police and intelligence circles over the rules governing the handling of agents and informers changed nothing until the conflict was over.¹¹

¹¹ Mark McGovern, *Counterinsurgency and Collusion in Northern Ireland* (2019), p.7. According to the 1999 report produced by British Irish Rights Watch (BIRW), “Deadly Intelligence: State involvement in Loyalist murder in Northern Ireland,” the FRU “allowed Brian Nelson to be centrally involved in loyalists’ acquisition of illegal weapons from South Africa, an operation of which MI5 [Security Service] also had knowledge.” As McGovern explains: This new arsenal of weapons was imported in December 1987 and “included over 200 Czech-made assault rifles, some 90 Browning pistols, anti-personnel grenades, several RPG-7 rocket launchers and thousands of rounds of ammunition. The history of these weapons casts some light on the sordid, complex world of international arms deals. Most were originally captured by the Israelis from the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1982, who gave them to their Lebanese, Christian, phalange

Indeed while the findings of the first official Stevens collusion inquiry had been published in 1990, it was not until “long after” the conflict had ended with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (of 1998) that Sir John Stevens was “able to access official British Army and RUC documents he had been told did not exist.” Indeed, as McGovern observed:

The search for truth about collusion has often been presented as a narrative of unbroken and dogged official investigation. However, public disclosure of the role of agents and informers has had to wait some considerable time, and is very far from complete... Collusion as a ‘rotten apple’, low-level problem of the past, became the official line, echoed by the RUC and military hierarchy, government and much of the media. It would be the dominant narrative for many years to come. Suggestions that collusion was endemic, state-sanctioned or systematic were long dismissed as republican propaganda. A quarter of a century later, Stevens acknowledged that collusion was clearly ‘far more widespread and extensive’ than he initially found. (pp.51-2)

This toxic state of affairs had been supported by all the main political parties in the British Parliament; and under the watch of the Labour Party’s right-wing defence minister, Roy Mason, in the late 1970s “justice took the form of arrests, torture in police custody, forced confessions, and convictions in non-jury courts solely on the basis of these confessions.”¹² Then, as now, this state-backed violence was

allies.” McGovern, *Counterinsurgency and Collusion in Northern Ireland*, p.57; also see McGovern, “Informers, agents and the liberal ideology of collusion in Northern Ireland,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 9(2), 2016. On the other side of the political divide, military support for the IRA received a big boost in 1986 when Libya donated “240 tons of weapons and explosives”. In later years the Force Research Unit and its earlier head in Northern Ireland Gordon Kerr “went on to serve in a senior intelligence role ‘recruiting double agents’ in Iraq.” McGovern, *Counterinsurgency and Collusion in Northern Ireland*, p.167.

¹² Hadden, *Beyond the Troubles?*, p.44.

vigorously opposed by ordinary members of the Labour Party, and prominent campaigns for justice were waged within the Labour movement against the determined opposition of right-wing Labour leaders. This included campaigns for the freeing of the Birmingham Six, who had been falsely accused of coordinating a bombing attack for the IRA that had taken place in 1974 causing 21 deaths (with the Birmingham Six only being found innocent and released from prison in 1991), and the campaign to release the Guildford Four, who were falsely imprisoned in 1975, only to be released in 1989 after their convictions were quashed.¹³ In both these instances an outstanding human rights activist/barrister named Gareth Peirce played a critical role in obtaining justice for those men who had been wrongly imprisoned on the basis of torture-induced confessions.

Today Peirce continues to fight for the release of Muslims who have been falsely imprisoned as part of the War on Terror (which most famously saw her representing Moazzam Begg). While at the moment Peirce is representing four Muslim men (Naweed Ali, Khobaib Hussain, Mohibur Rahman and Tahir Aziz) who were imprisoned in 2017 on terrorism offences – with their case being featured in the recent documentary *The Birmingham 4: A Grave Miscarriage of Justice* (2023). “This case rests on the police fabrication and mendacity in the clearest way,” Peirce has stated, who added that it was “like being in a timewarp”.¹⁴

Reflecting upon her previous legal wrangling as undertaken in the context of Northern Ireland, in 2008 Peirce observed how...

...it is dangerously misleading when we look to the recent past for lessons for the present to acknowledge the many terrible wrongs in Northern Ireland’s recent history and yet to assert that it was the conflict in Northern Ireland that produced them. It was instead injustice itself, again and again, that

¹³ In 1985, Granada TV’s World in Action series released an important early documentary titled “The Birmingham Six” which was based upon evidence that would later comprise Chris Mullin’s book *Error of Judgement: The Birmingham Bombings* (1986). The case of the Guildford Four was made into the biographical film *In the Name of the Father* (1993).

¹⁴ Jon Robins, “‘An utterly Islamophobic verdict by a jury who didn’t care the evidence was bent’,” *Justice Gap*, February 17, 2023.

created and fuelled the conflict. To map its thirty-year trajectory is to discover that before Bloody Sunday, when British soldiers shot and killed thirteen unarmed Catholic demonstrators who were marching to demand not in fact a united Ireland but equal rights in employment, education and housing (as well as an end to internment), the IRA was a diminished organisation, unable to recruit. After Bloody Sunday, overnight volunteers from every part of Ireland and every background came forward. Throughout the years of bloody armed conflict, every lawless action on the part of the British state provoked a similar reaction: internment, ‘shoot to kill’, the use of torture (hooding, extreme stress positions, mock executions), brutally obtained false confessions and fabricated evidence... We should keep all this in mind as we look at the experiences of our new suspect community.¹⁵

From the IRA to Islamists

Many lessons should have been learnt from the British government’s response to the IRA, but political authorities remain blind to heeding any democratic insights. This is most glaringly obvious by the way in which the British government backed Islamic anti-Communist “freedom-fighters” throughout the 1980s. And while it is true that the bulk of the money that financed/created this movement of Afghani extremists (to the tune of billions of dollars) came from the US government and from its reactionary allies in the region (notably Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia), the British government also played

¹⁵ Gareth Peirce’s essay “Was it like this for the Irish?” is reproduced in her book *Dispatches from the Dark Side: On Torture and the Death of Justice* (2010). For more on this see Mark McGovern and Angela Tobin, “Countering terror or counter-productive? Comparing Irish and British Muslim experiences of counter-insurgency,” Report of a Symposium held in Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, Falls Road, Belfast, 23-24 June 2009. Within this latter report Moazzam Begg states: “I have been coming to the North of Ireland since my release from Guantanamo. And one of the main reasons was to try and meet with former prisoners, particularly those prisoners who had gone through similar or worse experiences than I had, and to try and pull out the similarities and parallels and differences.” (p.9)

a supportive role too. To take just one example, “Britain supplied at least 600 ‘Blowpipe’ shoulder launched anti-aircraft missiles to mujahidin groups, beginning in spring 1986.”¹⁶

Furthermore, to correct the often-confused record on how the war in Afghanistan started, it should be emphasised that American support for mujahidin fighters had predated the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and it was this earlier intervention that effectively pushed the Soviet leaders to fall into a trap set by the US government. Tariq Ali sketches out this history in his book *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity* (2002). Ali quotes President Carter's National Security chief Zbigniew Brzezinski as saying (in an interview undertaken in 1998) that:

According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the Mujahidin began during 1980, that is to say, after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan, 24 Dec. 1979. But the reality, secretly guarded until now, is completely otherwise...

In 1988 when the USSR were finally forced to withdraw from Afghanistan, the American government then ignored a political agreement they had signed with their Soviet adversaries and “continued its policy of promoting the *mujahidin*.” As Middle Eastern analyst Fred Halliday explained: “This illegal decision, taken as part of the USA’s global cold war strategy, was the root of the subsequent chaos and fighting, which led to the triumph of the Islamist guerillas [who were still fighting in Afghanistan] in 1992.” Throwing further fuel on this reactionary fire, Halliday adds that the next “fateful decision taken by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and, at least to some degree, condoned by the West, was to create the Taliban and support their drive to power in 1994-96.”¹⁷ It was only after this military success on

¹⁶ Owen Bowcott, “UK discussed plans to help mujahideen weeks after Soviet invasion of Afghanistan,” *Guardian*, December 30, 2010; Mark Curtis, “Training in terrorism: Britain’s Afghan jihad,” *MarkCurtis.info*, September 30, 2016; Curtis, *Web of Deceit: Britain’s Real Role in the World* (2003), p.63. For a Marxist introduction these issues, see Aijaz Ahmad, “Islam, Islamisms and the West,” in: *Socialist Register 2008: Global Flashpoints: Reactions to Imperialism and Neoliberalism* (2008).

¹⁷ Fred Halliday, *Two Hours that Shook the World September 11, 2001:*

the part of the Taliban that Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida terrorist movement returned to Afghanistan. And notably, it should be stated for the record, that...

Between 1994 and 1996 Washington maintained a shaky and ambivalent relationship with the Taliban and provided it with vital political support through its traditional allies in the region, namely Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. By propping up the Taliban, policy makers in Washington thought they could create an anti-Iranian and anti-Shi'a movement which could severely limit Iran's influence in the region. In Ahmed Rashid's view, the Taliban, which had not yet tasted real power, tempted the USA to believe that: "The movement disliked Iran, that it would curb poppy cultivation and heroin production, that it was opposed to all outsiders remaining in Afghanistan and including the Arab-Afghans and it had no desire to seize power or rule the country. As a matter of fact, some US diplomats who had opened up contact with the Taliban saw them as messianic do-gooders—like born-again Christians from the American Bible Belt."¹⁸

Belatedly, the US government only hardened their political approach to the Taliban regime after bin Laden's successful terrorist attacks on the USA embassies in Kenya and Tanzania (on August 7, 1998). These bombings killed 224 people and led the US to respond by launching cruise missile strikes on terrorist bases in both Afghanistan (which included camps being run by Pakistani radicals) and in Sudan, hitting a pharmaceutical factory that was incorrectly linked to bin Laden.¹⁹ Furthermore, given the fact that bin Laden was not harmed

Causes and Consequences (2013), p.38.

¹⁸ Amalendu Misra, "The Taliban, radical Islam and Afghanistan," *Third World Quarterly*, 23(3), 2002, p.182.

¹⁹ After serving his stint as a "freedom-fighter" waging war on behalf of Washington and Downing Street bin Laden had "founded al-Qaeda in Pakistan," and had "ran his first operations in 1988 on behalf of his secret network against South Yemeni officials, especially in Hadramaut" with "the full knowledge and support of both the North Yemeni and Saudi intelligence apparatus." Bin Laden's relationship with the Saudi's would take a turn for

by this return of fire, it is widely understood that these missile strikes served to boost the warlords ability to recruit to his al-Qaeda network. Indeed as one mainstream media commentator put it, the failure of the US air strikes “established bin Laden as a legendary figure not just in the Muslim world but wherever America, with the clamor of its narcissistic culture and the presence of its military forces, had made itself unwelcome.”²⁰

Sanctions were now imposed by the United Nations upon al-Qaeda and their associates which included the Taliban (which began to be applied on October 15, 1999). But the government of Pakistan, which remained the US’s primary ally in the region, continued to support the Taliban until the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It was only after this attack on US soil took place that the Pakistani government was forced to reverse their position on supporting the Taliban.²¹

In his 2010 book *Secret Affairs: Britain’s Collusion with Radical Islam* foreign policy analyst Mark Curtis explores the role played by Western political elites in creating the conditions by which radical Islam could flourish worldwide.²² With his eye firmly on Britain, Curtis attempts to understand why successive governments failed to stop Islamic extremists, fresh from fighting in Afghanistan, from continuing their religious wars in Britain. With ‘retired’

the worst with the launching of the first Gulf War. Jean-Pierre Filiu, *From Deep State to Islamic State: The Arab Counter-Revolution and its Jihadi Legacy* (2015), p.140.

²⁰ Lawrence Wright, “The man behind Bin Laden,” *The New Yorker*, September 8, 2002. “The strikes, which, in the big-chested parlance of military planners, were dubbed Operation Infinite Reach, cost American taxpayers seventy-nine million dollars, but they merely exposed the inadequacy of American intelligence. President Clinton later explained that one of the strikes had been aimed at a ‘gathering of key terrorist leaders,’ but the meeting in question had occurred a month earlier.”

²¹ Ijaz Ahmad Khan, “Understanding Pakistan's pro-Taliban Afghan policy,” *Pakistan Horizon*, 60(2), 2007.

²² An informative review of Curtis’ work is provided by Professor Tahir Abbas’s essay: “Britain’s Secrets of Radical Islam — a book review essay,” *Medium*, November 11, 2018.

mujahidin freedom fighters facing next to no opposition from the British state even after 9/11, Curtis speculates...

... that the hosting of a variety of militant groups in London during the 1990s would have been seen by some, at least, in the intelligence community, even if not a formal policy of the government, as helping to further the long-standing interest in international divide and rule. Terrorist activities could raise tensions, put pressure on states by undermining their leaderships or divide states from each other - functions all seen as useful by British elites at certain times in the postwar world. (p.265)

And on the issue of this special relationship (or covenant) between extremists and the British state, Curtis adds:

For one thing, individual Islamic extremists such as Abu Hamza and (for a while at least) the Palestinian-born Jordanian cleric Abu Qatada, were allowed to continue their activities [after 9/11 occurred] ... Moreover, Whitehall's 'green light' to terrorism overseas was not switched off either. In fact, it directly contributed to the London bombings over three years later. In 2004, for example, MI5 monitoring of some of the later London bombers discovered them 'talking about jihadi activity in Pakistan and support for the Taliban', but since they were not discussing terrorist attacks in Britain, MI5 left them alone; the standard policy that was a crucial part of the covenant. Had MI5 decided to act against these overseas activities, it is possible that 7/7 could have been prevented. (p.258)²³

²³ In addition to highlighting the extremism of Abu Hamza and Abu Qatada, Curtis adds: "Finally, there is the case of Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed, the Syrian-born head of al-Muhajiroun. Bakri's case is especially interesting in light of his possible cooperation with British intelligence in sending jihadists to Kosovo in the late 1990s, alongside MI6's covert operation to help train Kosovo Liberation Army fighters in secret camps in Albania. At this time, Bakri was being described in the British media as the 'head of the political wing of the International Islamic Front' founded by Osama bin Laden. It is also interesting given al-Muhajiroun's connections to the July

The Violent Legacy of Abu Hamza

The British state's engagement with Abu Hamza, the Islamist preacher who became notorious for his hook arm and his firebrand speeches, provides a suitable lens through which to examine the government's response to this new terrorist threat. And while Hamza is presently serving a life sentence in America, his crimes consisted of actions which had been largely ignored by British security services. As Curtis surmises:

Evidence in the public domain suggests that in early 1997 Special Branch began talking to Hamza, when he was the preacher at the mosque in Luton, to act as an informant on other jihadists, and he was ascribed a codename: Damson Berry. Unknown to the police, MI5 also began meeting Hamza at the behest of French intelligence, which was seeking information on GIA activists [Islamist terrorists based in Algeria]; Hamza is said to have recruited and coordinated fundraising for the GIA, as well as publishing their newsletter, which was edited by the cleric Abu Qatada. MI5 held seven meetings with Hamza between 1997 and 2000. Sean O'Neill and Daniel McGrory note in their book on Hamza that he had 'a friendly relationship' with MI5 and Special Branch in the late 1990s: 'They called him regularly, invited him for meetings and were generally on cordial terms. (pp.265-6)

Here Curtis is referring to O'Neill and McGrory's book *The Suicide Factory: Abu Hamza and the Finsbury Park Mosque* (2006).²⁴ And this

2005 London bombings." (*Secret Affairs*, p.273) On the subject of these connections, Richard Seymour provides a useful rebuttal to Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed's fairly well-known book *The London Bombings: An Independent Inquiry* (2006) which can be found on his now defunct blog, Lenin's Tomb (June 25, 2006).

²⁴ It is significant *The Suicide Factory* authors had both served as senior journalists with Rupert Murdoch's Islamophobic broadsheet, *The Times*. And while it was hardly a secret that Abu Hamza was recruiting for violence, in writing their sensational expose of Hamza's crimes Sean O'Neill and Daniel McGrory failed to entertain the likelihood that some of the Muslims serving time in prison for allegedly being al-Qaeda agents might actually be

book's authors, in telling the early story of Abu Hamza's life, recount how after completing a degree in civil engineering at Brighton Polytechnic in 1989, Hamza had moved to London and "immersed himself in radical Islam" whereupon he first came into contact with the fundamentalist cleric Omar Abdel-Rahman, who was known as the blind Sheikh. A cleric whose "travels were reportedly funded by the CIA" (which was true).²⁵

After working on various construction jobs (including at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst) Hamza moved to Afghanistan (in 1991) where he was employed as an engineer in Jalalabad. During this time overseas Hamza lost both his hands along with one eye in a mysterious accident involving an explosive device, and he subsequently returned to the UK sometime in late 1993 where he embraced a religious career under the spiritual guidance of Abu Qatada – "one of the fiercest advocates of the global jihad."²⁶ A few years later, in 1995, Hamza is said to have made three 'humanitarian'-related trips to Bosnia in support of mujahidin fighters – fighters whose side, not incidentally, enjoyed covert support from Western governments throughout the Bosnian War (1992-1995). This backing is discussed in *Secret Affairs* in a chapter titled "A covert war in Bosnia," and in introducing this history Curtis writes:

European governments, including the British government of

innocent (this is a significant oversight made by many journalists).

²⁵ O'Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, p.17, p.18. Abdel-Rahman was later imprisoned for life for his role in the World Trade Center bombing of 1993. After moving to America in 1990 Abdel-Rahman had been actively recruiting volunteers for the anti-Soviet jihad, and as pointed out by another more critical historian, the Egyptian Sheikh had arrived in Brooklyn in July 1990 on a "US tourist visa, even though his name was on a list of terrorist suspects because of his record of militancy in Egypt. The US Embassy in Khartoum issued the visa. There, US diplomats claimed, a computer error in the English-language spelling of the Sheikh's name caused the error of issuing the Sheikh's visa. Later, it transpired that CIA officers, at Khartoum or elsewhere, had consciously assisted his entry." John Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, American and International Terrorism* (1999), p.235.

²⁶ O'Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, p.29.

John Major, were widely criticised for failing to halt the atrocities, which, while perpetrated by all sides, were principally conducted by Serb forces against Bosnia's Muslim community. Yet Britain played a significant, if limited, covert role in the war, supplying arms to Bosnian Muslim and Croat forces and turning a blind eye to US arms supplies to, and military training of, these forces. Most importantly, Britain also acquiesced in, and may have covertly assisted, the movement of some Islamist militants into Bosnia as up to 4,000 volunteers went there to fight the Serbs; the militants were funded by al-Qaida, the Saudis and various Islamic 'charities', amidst a wave of solidarity around the Muslim world with the plight of their co-religionists. (p.206)

After Hamza's exploits in Bosnia, he returned to the UK where some of his supporters invited him to become an imam at a small mosque in Luton, a premises which now gave him the space to begin to cultivate his notoriety as a militant preacher. And partly owing to the shortage of imam's who could preach in English, Hamza soon marketed himself as a positive addition to the leadership of the larger Finsbury Park mosque which was based in North London. Related to the generalised poverty that was particularly rife in British Muslim communities (which was facilitated by state-backed racism), the once-prestigious mosque was now facing financial troubles, and after being charmed by Hamza – who was always a competent manipulator – the mosque's trustees offered the preacher a two-year contract in early 1997. From this new base Hamza soon drew ever larger crowds to hear his angry sermons that advocated violent resistance to Western imperialism.

In 1997 Hamza was in the enviable position of now being able to pose as the most radical cleric in town which he achieved by continuing to back the GIA Islamic terrorists in Algeria. This is because by mid-1996 many of Hamza's former colleagues like Abu Qatada, had begun to distance themselves from the murderous terrorist activities being undertaken by the GIA, particularly now that the GIA had turned their violent jihad against Muslims as well as non-Muslims.²⁷ Indeed, during this time, the...

²⁷ Brynjar Lia's book *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaida Strategist*

...most decisive blow to the GIA was dealt by those in London who had previously given it legitimacy in the world's eyes through the publication of *Al-Ansar*. On May 31 1996, its editors suspended the bulletin. Then, on June 6, the two principal London ideologists of the jihadist-salafist persuasion, Abu Qatada and the Syrian Abu Musab, joined with Zawahiri's Egyptian Gamaa Islamiya and a Libyan armed

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri (2008) provides many useful details about the evolution of the GIA's overseas media operations. Thus, Abu Musab al-Suri moved to London in 1994 where he became one of the editors of the GIA's primary propaganda outlet, the *al-Ansar Newsletter*, which served as his "main preoccupation in 1994-6". The founder and editor of *al-Ansar* was Abu Qatada who himself had arrived in London in September 1993, and another important editor of this newsletter was Abu Hamza, while their administrator was Rachid Ramda (who would be later imprisoned for his role in financing the GIA's 1995 bombing campaign in France for allegedly sending them a £5,000 money order).

Eventually "the high expectations which al-Suri and his fellow jihadis [including Qatada] had attached to the Algerian jihad... were thoroughly quashed by the spiralling barbarism of the GIA's violence under the emirate of Jamal Zaytuni (1994-6) and his successor Antar al-Zouabri (1996-2002)". Zaytuni is infamous for extending GIA attacks to France, initially with the hijacking of Air France Flight 8969 (in December 1994) which was followed by a series of bombings inside France.

But while al-Suri celebrated the "strategy of internationalising the conflict" within the pages of *al-Ansar* – at the very same time that the GIA undertook "indiscriminate attacks" upon their enemies (which included Muslims) – al-Suri and others began to distance themselves from the GIA. As one historian explains: "The lack of a discernible strategy behind the attacks led to speculation, encouraged by the GIA's opponents that the group had been infiltrated by Algerian secret services, a claim that subsequently received corroboration from a variety of sources. A turning point for al-Suri and his like-minded associates was the execution of several prominent GIA leaders from the *al-Jaz'arah* faction". From 1996 al-Suri would now begin working with bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network, which led him "to serve as the "intermediary for Channel 4 and CNN when they went to Afghanistan to interview bin Laden in 1996 and early 1997." (*Architect of Global Jihad*, p.155, pp.157-8, p.162, p.153)

group to announce that they had withdrawn their support from [Jamal] Zitouni, who was guilty of ‘deviations’ in the implementation of the jihad.²⁸

Abu Hamza however disagreed with his former colleagues and “In February [1997], Hamza relaunched the publication *Al-Ansar*”.²⁹ But while Hamza obtained some success and infamy by rallying “his followers on behalf of the GIA” in early 1997, as the summer passed and the GIA’s use of indiscriminate acts of violence escalated, Hamza’s speeches, as one mosque spy put it, became “more tentative”. Hamza “spoke less and less about Algeria in his sermons” putting more emphasis on his own “apocalyptic vision” about the growing power of the Yemen’s Islamic movement.³⁰

Describing the attraction of this new up-and-coming preacher to the frustrated Muslim youth, *The Suicide Factory*’s authors observe: “To hear Abu Hamza preach was to be assaulted by a machine-gun of florid rhetoric and London street talk. It was Osama bin Laden meets Alf Garnett.” In “full flow” his words seemed “irresistible and unstoppable.”³¹ But Hamza was a preacher of murder, and the authors point out how: “The dark heart in the make-up of this powerful orator is the relentless bloodlust in his words.” As Hamza famously preached in an unusually blunt sermon delivered in September 1999: “Killing an adulterer, even if he is a Muslim, is ok. Killing a kaffir [non-believer] who is fighting you is ok. Killing a kaffir

²⁸ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (2002), pp.270-1.

²⁹ Kepel, *Jihad*, p.272.

³⁰ Omar Nasiri, *Inside the Jihad: My Life with Al Qaeda - A Spy's Story* (2006). Around this time Nasiri recalls “Abu Hamza publicly denounced the GIA, just as Abu Qatada had done many months earlier. And like Abu Qatada, he announced that he would no longer support *Al Ansar*.” On his belated transition from emphasising Yemen over Algeria, Nasiri writes: “Abu Hamza was obsessed with Yemen. He believed that the global Islamic revolution would begin there. ‘It will come out of Aden,’ he always said. If *sharia* was established in Yemen, other secular regimes would fall like dominoes.”

³¹ O’Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, p.54, p.55.

for any reason ... you can say it is ok even if there is no reason for it.”³² These vile words represent hate speech at its worst, which is why socialists continue to organise to oppose all individuals who make such murderous utterances; but to be clear, socialists do not call upon the authority of the government to censor such speech.³³

Initially at least, it appeared that Hamza’s far-right credentials may not have been entirely visible to the Finsbury Park mosque’s trustees when, in early 1997, they had chosen him as their new imam. But by the time the trustees came to realise their error Hamza had already seized political control of their premises.³⁴ At first, desperate for a quick solution to Hamza’s authoritarianism the trustees turned to the local police force for aid. But when the police ignored them, they attempted to use legal means to evict Hamza, serving a High

³² O’Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, p.57.

³³ Socialists similarly oppose the hate speech of far-right Christian leaders including the anti-Muslim diatribes of Donald Trump. But socialists do not call upon the state to persecute individuals (neither Hamza nor Trump) for the words they utter. This is because socialists understand that governments that are granted such powers to silence free speech can then use such laws to attack any form of speech that they deem unacceptable.

³⁴ After Abu Hamza’s imprisonment, in 2005 the Finsbury Park mosque’s trustees gained the support of the Metropolitan police’s Muslim Contact Unit to regain control of their premises from Hamza’s supporters. Five years later, the right-wing Labour MP Khalid Mahmood resigned from his position as a trustee and then falsely accused the mosque of being linked to the suspected al-Qaeda terrorists, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab and Anwar al-Awlaki. In recalling these events, Robert Lambert – who oversaw the mosque’s reopening while serving as the head of the Muslim Contact Unit (2002-7) – observed: “Typically, Blairite MP Khalid Mahmood, only ever a token mosque trustee who obstructed efforts to remove Abu Hamza and his supporters prior to February 2005 – renewed his reputation for divisiveness in 2010 when he sided with the mosque’s powerful critics.” “Khalid Mahmood’s false claims increase risk of Islamophobic attacks on NLCM,” *North London Central Mosque Press Release*, July 22, 2010; Robert Lambert, “Mohammed Sawalha: a maligned and vindicated British-Palestinian citizen,” *Middle East Monitor*, January 25, 2014.

Court injunction upon Hamza on October 29, 1998.³⁵ This legal tactic however failed. And after spending around £14,000 on legal fees the mosque's trustees accepted a "truce" when Hamza promised to let them select their own preacher to work alongside him. Soon after this truce was obtained, it turned out that Hamza became something of a media star, with the preacher's international notoriety growing because of his link to a Yemeni terrorist incident which took place in late December 1998. During this act of terrorism Hamza had acted as a propagandist for the Yemeni Islamists who had had kidnapped 16 tourists before murdering four of them (three of whom were British). Adding to Hamza's newfound ill-repute, around this time Hamza's son and stepson had been arrested in the Yemen, where they were found guilty of planning to undertake a terrorist attack; although in this case it seems likely that his sons and their friends may have been set-up or scapegoated by the authoritarian Yemeni regime which itself had a proud history of cooperating with jihadists.³⁶

³⁵ O'Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, p.47.

³⁶ O'Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, p.51. The 16 foreign tourists had been kidnapped by Yemeni terrorists on December 28, 1998 (with four being murdered the following day), but it is significant (in terms of timing at least) that just prior to this incident, five British Muslims were arrested on December 24 by the Yemeni government and later charged with planning to commit terrorist attacks. One of the five Muslims to be arrested was Hamza's eighteen-year-old stepson, Mohsen Ghailan. The authors of *The Suicide Factory* comment that of all the prosecuted terrorists in this case:

"The most intriguing figure was Mohsen Ghailan, a cocky Londoner with dyed red hair. Even his prison guards had to concede that he hardly fitted the description of a hardened zealot. When they invited him to pray, he told them he didn't know how many times a day a Muslim should say his prayers. Nor did he ask which wall of his cell faced Mecca. He just shrugged his shoulders and said religion did not interest him. What really fascinated the authorities was Ghailan's curious family set-up in west London, and his relationship with his step father Abu Hamza. The cleric had adopted the boy, who was from his second wife's first marriage, but regarded him as a disappointment who spent more time playing computer games than studying the Koran." (p.161)

Later four other British Muslims were added into the Yemen trial of the initial five on different but related charges, and one of these included

Hamza's son (Mohamed Kamel, aged 17). During their ensuing trial Hamza denied any knowledge of his two sons' involvement in any form of jihad. In fact, when asked why he had sent them on a terrorist mission to Yemen he simply said:

“If I had sent them, I would have made sure they changed their names by deed poll [something that he did before travelling overseas]. After all, it only costs £25, and I would have made sure they didn't check into cheap hotels. That's a very crude thing. It shows they didn't have any experience, no boss to tell them what to do. If I had wanted to train them, I would have sent them to Afghanistan, it's much better there.” (*The Suicide Factory*, p.176)

It therefore seems likely that the young men were not planning a terrorist plot, and instead were primarily prosecuted because of the terrorist kidnapping that followed shortly after their arrest and Hamza's personal connection to these kidnapers. In addition, the five British Muslims only confessed to being involved in a terrorist plot after being tortured while being held incommunicado by the Yemen authorities. And by all indications their trial was a farce which could have led to them being sentenced to death if human rights activists from the UK (including Amnesty International) had not become involved. Representing the five accused in this instance was Gareth Peirce who in exasperation said: “The lawyers out [in Yemen] are not really able to be lawyers at all. We are worried that we are giving the trial credibility even by being there.” International human rights lawyer Michael McColgan said, “It was absolute chaos in court. The judge seemed to intervene without rhyme or reason and the quality of interpretation was appalling.” “Mr McColgan also doubted the validity of items of ammunition as evidence since they had been handled by police.” That being said, Ghalian ended up serving seven years in prison before returning to the UK, while Kamel served three years. In 2008 the two brothers would be jailed again for operating a £1million car scam which could not be connected in any way to Islamist politics or causes, as according to conservative sources it was admitted that the money they raised was simply used “to fund a 'party lifestyle'.” (*The Daily Mail* ran with the headline “Hamza sons stole £1million worth of luxury cars to fund party lifestyle.”)

Audrey Gillan, Ian Black, and Andrew Whitaker, “Yemen terror case suspects 'signed false confessions,” *Guardian*, January 13, 1999; Rory Carroll, Aden Whitaker, and Brian Whitaker, “Court chaos as five fight jail,” *Guardian*, January 31, 1999; “'Chaotic' Yemen trial delayed again,” *BBC News*, January 30, 1999.

When it came to the Yemeni related actions of Hamza, the British police had been fully aware of his direct communications with the kidnappers when they had arrested him on March 15, 1999. At this time, “More than 750 video and audio tapes of his sermons were seized in a search of his house, as were the eleven volumes of the *Encyclopaedia of the Afghani Jihad*.” While in custody Hamza was questioned “about his connections with events in Yemen, specifically the sending of young men for terrorist training and his links with the Army of Aden.” And then four days later, Hamza walked free with no charges being pressed against him. The only action taken against Hamza was that the police confiscated his passport.³⁷

Evidently the authorities considered any crimes that Hamza might have committed to be insignificant. Either way, what we do know is that Hamza felt emboldened by the lack of criminal repercussions for his actions; actions that contributed towards the intensification of the mainstream medias Islamophobia which was both encouraging and reflecting the deeply held racist ideas being perpetuated by the British state. Thus, it is fitting that one of the most prominent spies who had succeeded in infiltrating Hamza’s mosque recalled that his first MI5 handler “was a racist. He hated the Scots, he didn’t like the Irish, and he detested black people.”³⁸

³⁷ O’Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, p.141, p.143, p.144, p.147.

³⁸ O’Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, p.139. The spy was Reda Hassaine who from early 1995 onwards had served as an informant for the Algerian intelligence agency in the Finsbury Park area. By early 1997 he had also began working for the French intelligence agency with a focus on gathering intelligence on Abu Hamza and the attendees at his mosque. To boost his radical credentials amongst those he was infiltrating, in 1998 Hassaine initiated the publication of a French-language pro-Islamist newsletter whose first frontpage led with the headline “Jihad against the United States” which was set alongside a picture of Osama bin Laden. Eventually the French agents working with Hassaine terminated their relationship with him because they didn’t trust the new Algerian intelligence agents to maintain Hassaine’s cover. As a result of these changes, in November 1998 Hassaine started informing for the Special Branch, and six months later was passed into the hands of the racist MI5 agents, with whom he remained eternally frustrated when they did nothing to stop Hamza. O’Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, p.131, p.134, p.135, pp.137-8.

Back at the Finsbury Park mosque, Hamza was firmly in control, and as soon as his employers (the trustees) had dropped their legal proceedings and accepted his “truce” Hamza had simply reneged on his promise of a compromise. From this point on Hamza was left unhindered in his ability to encourage young Muslims to fight in Muslim wars against the West, a project of radicalisation and recruitment that it should be noted was entirely lawful. Indeed, as the authors of *The Suicide Factory* acknowledge, one of the reasons why Hamza was not prosecuted – leaving aside his friendly links to the British intelligence community – was because: “It was not until late 2001, when the controversial Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act was passed into law, that sending someone abroad to undergo terrorist training and instruction became a criminal offence.”³⁹ Although it should be added that the Terrorism Act 2000 had already made it an

On April 21, 2000, Hassaine was to report that he had been beaten up by Hamza’s cronies and as he was attacked, he “heard shouts of ‘Get him, kill him, kill him, he’s a spy, kill him.’” This was reported to MI5, but as his cover had been blown they simply advised him to lay low and he recalls while walking around North London where he recalled that he would occasionally be recognised by leading figures from Hamza’s mosque as he continued to live in North London. When Hassaine went to the press with his story, MI5 then terminated their relationship with him, and shortly thereafter Hassaine gave a scoop to the *Observer* newspaper that was published in February 2001. O’Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, p.149, p.151.

³⁹ O’Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, p.291. It is relevant to note that in the UK it was the passing of the Terrorism Act 2000 “that largely facilitated the designation of Muslims as the principal suspect community.” More to the point: “As many of the [newly] proscribed groups are located within or have connections to minority ethnic and refugee communities in the United Kingdom, the criminalization of activities and relationships involving these groups serves to implicate the whole community. This point is well illustrated by [Gareth] Peirce’s discussion of proscription, noting that ‘more than one million people from refugee communities which are involved in liberation movements, movements of self-determination, resistance against tyrannies, are now inescapably criminalized’.” Christina Pantazis and Simon Pemberton, “From the ‘old’ to the ‘new’ suspect community: examining the impacts of recent UK counter-terrorist legislation,” *British Journal of Criminology*, 49(5), 2009, p.652.

offence to support proscribed international terrorist organisations like al-Qaida (which was proscribed by the UK government in March 2001).

We now know that from 1998 onwards Hamza had run at least one military training session in Wales for wannabe jihadists, the timing of which coincided with the period when Hamza was in close contact with both Special Branch and MI5. A cosy relationship which led him to have “at least seven meetings” with MI5 between 1997 and 2000. However, it was only in 2004 that Hamza was finally arrested in Britain and subsequently prosecuted. The push factor for his arrest seemingly linked to the fact that the US government had decided to indict Hamza in relation to three terrorist related charges: these being that “he conspired to take hostages in the Yemen” (in 1998), that he sought “to set up a terrorist training camp in Oregon” (in 1999), and that he gave “other support to terrorists” in Afghanistan.

None of these accusations were particularly new; and most of the evidence that substantiated these charges had been available to the British authorities since as early as 1998 – the time of Hamza’s first brief arrest. Hamza was therefore arrested by the British authorities in late 2004 and found guilty in 2006. And during this successful prosecution the *Guardian* reported that: “A former MI5 undercover agent who informed on activities in the [Finsbury Park] mosque to MI5, and a close Abu Hamza associate... told the *Guardian* [Hamza] was an ‘unwitting’ informant for the security services, even informing on Islamic extremists.”⁴⁰ Then following his 2012 release, Hamza was extradited to the US, where he was eventually sent to prison for life with no parole.⁴¹

Few would disagree that the world is a safer place with Hamza

⁴⁰ Vikram Dodd, Duncan Campbell and Richard Norton-Taylor, “Tories challenge delay in prosecuting cleric,” *Guardian*, February 9, 2006.

⁴¹ In his US trial “Hamza was accused of being a terrorist of global reach, and was charged with providing material support to terrorist organizations by enabling hostage-takers in the Yemen kidnapping to speak on a satellite phone, by sending men to establish an al-Qaida training camp in Bly, Oregon, and by sending at least one man to training camps in Afghanistan.” He was convicted of all eleven charges against him. Karen McVeigh, “Abu Hamza found guilty of 11 terrorism charges,” *Guardian*, May 20, 2014.

in prison, but it remains the case that Western governments haven't learnt any democratic lessons from his incarceration. For one, it is obvious that the actions of the British intelligence community only encouraged Hamza to "do as he pleased" in pushing the mujahidin's global war against the West;⁴² with British intelligence agencies learning nothing from the disastrous blowback that flowed from their prior covert support for paramilitary loyalists in Northern Ireland or for that matter from their backing of the mujahidin in Afghanistan. Furthermore, even in what should have been the straightforward prosecution of Hamza, the US government relied upon extremely unreliable evidence that was presented by informants seeking lighter sentences for themselves (discussed next). And as is so often the case in such prosecutions, evidence obtained by torture was to play a critical role in securing the conviction of many of those radical Muslims associated with Hamza.

Tortured Convictions and Terrorist Atrocity's

To start with we can examine the case against one individual who was allegedly closely tied to Abu Hamza and his efforts to recruit for the jihadist war in Afghanistan. This person was an Algerian named Djamel Beghal who is named in *The Suicide Factory* as "one of the most influential figures" working for al-Qaeda to be associated with Hamza's mosque. Beghal had moved with his family to Leicester from France in October 1997 after apparently serving as "al-Qaeda's man

⁴² As the BBC reported in February 2006, shortly after Hamza was first imprisoned, the papers "relating to some of the MI5 and Special Branch interviews with the cleric in the late 90s... show the extent of the contacts the authorities had. His lawyer says that is why he thought he was doing nothing illegal." The BBC report added that their Home Affairs Correspondent Margaret Gilmore had explained: "If you look at those transcripts, you will see what a close relationship Abu Hamza had with MI5. Whether you admit it or not, you could be forgiven for getting the impression there was an unspoken understanding that as long as they kept tabs on him, he was allowed to be able to do as he pleased." "Joint effort' in Hamza hate case," *BBC*, February 8, 2006.

in Paris”.⁴³ This accusation however only came to light in July 2001 when Beghal had been arrested and tortured in the United Arab Emirates. The authors of *The Suicide Factory* describe his arrest like this:

In custody in the United Arab Emirates, Beghal confessed, and revealed the details of a series of plots. He later retracted the confession, claiming that he was tortured. But the information he gave led to a string of successful anti-terrorist investigations across Europe – including the winding up of his fundraising and recruitment operations in London and Leicester. Despite Beghal’s clear links to Finsbury Park, however, there was no search of the building and no attempt to arrest the chief recruiter who led the prayers there. (p.92)

The Suicide Factory’s version of events was published in 2006, but since then, other evidence relating to Beghal’s case has been made public that is far more concerning than the fact that the police failed to extend their investigation to Hamza and his mosque. This is because in 2011 the Muslim human rights group CAGE released a report which observed:⁴⁴

⁴³ O’Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, p.86. *The Guardian* reported that Djamel Beghal’s “first known contact with the authorities dates back to 1996, when he was questioned in France because his phone number had been found in the possession of a suspected terrorist. He was allowed to go free but remained under close surveillance in France.” In late 1997 he moved to Leicester, in England, with “his family to Leicester, apparently earning money by making sandwiches and working for a homeless charity while studying information technology.” The same newspaper report notes how after being arrested in United Arab Emirates in 2001 he was tortured and thereupon made a false confession about his involvement in terrorism. He “gave the full account” of his interrogation “to the campaign group CAGE in 2011”. Josh Halliday *et al.*, “Mentor of Charlie Hebdo gunmen has been UK-based,” *Guardian*, January 11, 2015.

⁴⁴ CAGE itself is regularly demonised by the political establishment precisely because they are effective in defending Muslim human rights. As Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan accurately observes in her important book *Tangled in Terror: Uprooting Islamophobia* (2022), those engaged in “organised resistance to Islamophobia are effectively criminalised unless they limit their

While the alleged [two month long] torture described by Beghal is horrific, the consequences of the false confessions obtained by the UAE authorities have had a devastating impact on the lives of dozens of individuals who were linked to the case. Until this very day, there are many who have been given long sentences, simply on the basis of false evidence extracted by torture. As recently exposed through Wikileaks, a French counterterrorism judge, Jean-François Ricard, stated that the case of Beghal and those associated with him only led to convictions due to the reputation of the judges, and would never have taken place due to the actual evidence.⁴⁵

concerns to 'hate crimes' and see legislation as the solution. But addressing securitisation, policing and imperialism as the source of Islamophobia frames you as an extremist. Take the NGO, CAGE, for example. They are one of the only Muslim-led organisations in the UK who actively work against the violence of counterterror legislation and War on Terror abuses, and they are widely derided as an 'Islamist front', full of 'terrorist-sympathisers'. Even Muslims who support their work have the affiliation weaponised against them... Such repression of Muslim resistance to Islamophobia is even more blatant elsewhere. In 2020, the French government sent letters of dissolution to Muslim-run organisations they called 'separatist', including the largest NGO tackling Islamophobia, Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF), who were forced to relocate to Belgium."

⁴⁵ Beghal recalled that while being tortured: "They wanted me to accuse Abu Qatada at any cost. They wanted me to accuse him of a military plot (bombing plan) or at least to make him responsible for the ideological and financial management of terrorist networks linking London to Kabul but also many other capitals in Europe, Africa and Asia." "Djamel Beghal: British and French complicity in torture," *CAGE*, 2011, p.13. Another case that seems related to Beghal's is that of Farid Hilali, who was first arrested and tortured in June 1999 by the UAE authorities on his return to the UK from his hajj religious pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia. Hilali was then tortured again in Morocco which resulted in him being forced to agree to be an informant; but once released from prison he "fled to Britain." While in prison Hilali had written to Moazzam Begg asking for his help, which resulted in Begg being visited in Birmingham by an MI5 agent who questioned him about Hilali. Begg would later be seized (in 2002) by Pakistani intelligence while in was living in Pakistan and then held in Guantanamo Bay until 2005. Hilali would be arrested once again in 2004 and was then held imprisoned awaiting a trial

Leaving aside Beghal's arguably wrongful prosecution and imprisonment, it remains the case that the French state still insist upon his guilt. Therefore to justify his incarceration they have asserted that, while in prison, Beghal had groomed Saïd and Chérif Kouachi - the murderous duo who would go on to carry out the Charlie Hebdo massacre.⁴⁶ The French state have also argued that prior to undertaking the Hebdo massacre both Saïd and Chérif had

for five years before being released. For more details on these and other cases, see "Fabricating Terrorism II: British Complicity in Renditions and Torture," *CAGE*, 2009.

⁴⁶ The individuals who were imprisoned for attempting to break Smaïn Aït Ali Belkacem out of prison included the Charlie Hebdo killer Chérif Kouachi who was said to have come under Beghal's influence while serving in prison. Yet Chérif Kouachi, who was imprisoned in 2005, had been radicalised as a potential jihadist prior to his incarceration by Farid Benyettou, while the other event that radicalised him was the racist so-called War on Terror, as apparently he was "Sickened by images of American soldiers humiliating Muslims at the Abu Ghraib prison". Rukmini Callimachi and Jim Yardley, "From amateur to ruthless jihadist in France," *New York Times*, January 17, 2015.

The other killer in the Hebdo case, Amédy Coulibaly, had served in prison for taking part in an armed robbery and had apparently befriended Beghal through the cell windows as his prison cell was situated directly below Beghal's. Then after Beghal's release from prison in 2009 Coulibaly had "made frequent trips to the hilly region of Cantal in southern France, where Beghal took up residence under house arrest after his own release." Soon after these visits, "In 2010, Beghal, Coulibaly and Chérif Kouachi were arrested in connection with a plot to free" Belkacem, where evidence presented to imprison the so-called plotters included phone call transcripts made from Beghal to Belkacem. Beghal and Coulibaly were once again put back in prison and Coulibaly was then released from prison in March 2014, but as "there was not enough evidence to convict Chérif Kouachi" he served no time in prison for his alleged involvement in the plot to free Belkacem (at the time it was reported that 14 people had been arrested as forming part of this plot). (Beghal served in prison until 2018 when after having his French citizenship stripped from him he was then forcibly repatriated to Algeria.)

Tom Burgis, "The making of a French jihadi," *Financial Times*, January 27, 2015; "France arrests 14 in plot to free bombing prisoner," *Reuters*, May 18, 2010.

collaborated with Beghal in a so-called plot to free Smaïn Aït Ali Belkacem from prison – an individual who was serving a life sentence (along with Boualem Bensaid) for apparently orchestrating the 1995 Paris bombings for the GIA.¹⁷ But the story as presented in most mainstream narrative’s is far from complete, and it is widely thought that it was agents of the repressive Algerian government itself that hold the primary responsibility for the 1995 bombing campaign. Drawing upon the research presented in Lounis Aggoun and Jean-Baptiste Rivoire’s 2004 book *Françalgérie: Crimes and Lies of the State*, in 2005 the *Guardian* reported that:

The DRS - the Algerian secret service - systematically infiltrated insurrectionary Islamist groups such as the GIA and from 1992 onwards launched its own fake guerrilla groups, including death squads disguised as Islamists. In 1994, the

¹⁷ Another individual charged with financing this 1995 terror plot was Rachid Ramda, as evidence suggested that Ramda had sent a money order for £5,000 (or \$8,700) from Britain to Bensaid. Ramda had been based in London in the early 1990s where he had edited the GIA-associated newsletter *al-Ansar*. He was eventually extradited to France in 2002 (having served time in a British prison since 1995) even though his legal representatives claimed “that the catch-all charge against Ramda, of taking part in a criminal conspiracy relating to terrorism, has been ridiculed by human rights observers as the equivalent of a medieval witchhunt.” Further demonstrating that the financing of terrorist acts does not really need to rely upon international money transfers (like the one allegedly made by Ramda), it is noteworthy that the Charlie Hebdo attacks was partly financed by the sale of a car and by “a loan of 6,000 euros” that Coulibaly obtained from the credit agency Cofidis in December 2014. For a historically-informed response to the Hebdo murders, see Alain Badiou’s 2015 essay “The Red Flag and the Tricolore”; Ruth Marshall, “The (in)secure citizen: Islamophobia and the natives of the Republic after Paris,” in Stephen Toope (ed.), *After the Paris Attacks: Responses in Canada, Europe, and Around the Globe* (2015); and for more about the counterproductive nature of the French government’s growing authoritarianism, see Jim Wolfreys, *Republic of Islamophobia: The Rise of Respectable Racism in France* (2018).

DRS managed to place Jamel Zitouni, one of the Islamists it controlled, at the head of the GIA.⁴⁸

The *Guardian* article then explained how in the months before the infamous Paris bombing campaign: “In Spring 1995, Ali Touchent, an Algerian agent, began to gather and incite a network of disaffected young men from north African backgrounds to commit terrorist attacks in France.” But while “Touchent evaded capture, returned to Algeria and settled in a secure police quarter of Algiers,” Belkacem, Bensaid and others were sent to prison.

Touchent’s mysterious escape story is touched upon in Omar Nasiri’s memoir, *Inside the Jihad: My Life with Al Qaeda - A Spy’s Story* (2006). Nasiri recounts how in early 1995 he had exposed a GIA cell in Belgium which had included his brother and Ali Touchent amongst others; although he recalls how Touchent “escaped the sting somehow”. Later Nasiri then highlighted how the following year, while he had been working as a spy within the Finsbury Park mosque, he’d put MI5 onto the trail of Touchent after identifying him at the mosque. But as the spy’s MI5 handler reported back to Nasiri: “He [Touchent] was at a café. Our guys were watching him. And then somehow he disappeared.” Yet this convenient and worrying tale of gross incompetence doesn’t end here, and Nasiri recalled that when the Algerian authorities informed the French government that Touchent had been killed sometime in late 1997, the French courts still “convicted Touchent in absentia.” Nasiri adds:

During that trial, several of the defendants claimed Touchent was not a member of the GIA at all. They said they had been manipulated by him, and that he was really an *agent*

⁴⁸ Naima Bouteldja, “Who really bombed Paris?,” *Guardian*, September 8, 2005. For details about the Algerian state’s role in overseeing the GIA’s terrorist attacks in France, see Jeremy Keenan, *The Dying Sahara: US Imperialism and Terror in Africa* (2013); Algeria Watch, “The Algerian Islamist movement: between autonomy and manipulation” (2004); Richard Norton-Taylor, “Terrorist case collapses after three years,” *Guardian*, March 21, 2000; John Sweeney and Leonard Doyle, “Algeria regime was behind Paris bombs,” *The Observer*, November 16, 1997.

provocateur, put in place by Algeria's military intelligence services. These rumors continue to circulate to this day.

At this point it is useful to return to the first failed attempt to apprehend Touchent in 1995, as in telling this story Nasiri said that “the biggest fish” the authorities had “caught that day was a man named Ahmed Zaoui” whom was “believed... was the head of the GIA’s European operations”. However, Zaoui, it now turns out was innocent. He was not a terrorist and had never even been a member of the GIA; and it was only in 2007, after serving time in prison in two different countries, and having battled years of misinformation spread by paranoid intelligence agencies, that Zaoui was finally cleared of all the fake terrorist charges laid against him.⁴⁹

Zaoui’s long battle for justice is outlined in the excellent 2010 documentary *Behind the Shroud* which includes an important interview with the former head of the Algerian secret service in Northern Europe who admits how he was personally involved in the attempts to neutralise Zaoui by concocting false evidence to smear him as a terrorist.⁵⁰ (Tragically, in October 2023 Zaoui was arrested when visiting Algeria where he presently stands accused of “subversion” by the Algerian regime for the so-called crime of participating in a political meeting.)

The anti-democratic effects of such government subterfuge involving the French, Algerian and Belgium authorities, also spilled

⁴⁹ Steven Price, “Terrorism by media: coverage of the Ahmed Zaoui affair,” *Pacific Journalism Review*, 10(1), 2004.

⁵⁰ Ahmed Zaoui had been successful in standing during Algeria’s January 1992 elections as member of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) which was the party that won control of the government. However, the military quickly moved to overturn the democratic elections and banned the FIS. And while some revolutionary Marxists like the Trotskyist PT (Workers’ Party), which was led by Louisa Hanoune, “favoured conciliation and the relegalisation of the FIS,” Stalinists, who have a long history of betraying workers, opposed such a stance. Thus “One faction, *Ettahaddi* (Challenge) which enjoyed the support of the French communist party, supported the military repression”. This issue is discussed in Ben Fowkes and Bülent Gökay’s *Muslims and Communists in Post-Transition States* (2011).

over to Britain, where the same foreign intelligence agencies had been monitoring the activities of leading GIA recruiters like Abu Hamza. On this matter, John Phillips and Martin Evans explain in their book, *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed* (2008), how following the Paris bombings of 1995 “the Algerian community in Britain, numbering twelve thousand by 2003, was coming under increasing surveillance.” As part of this crackdown “one of the biggest anti-terrorist operations ever mounted in Britain” zeroed in on this small but growing population, especially those individuals who attended the Finsbury Park mosque. This monumental anti-terror operation came to public prominence in early 2003, just prior to the invasion of Iraq, when MI5 alleged they had proof that Algerian terrorists “were about to launch a huge attack using ricin, [which was] one of the most lethal poisons known to humanity”. However, it quickly became evident that no ricin had ever been found. This however didn’t stop this so-called terror plot from proving vital in helping Tony Blair justify the invasion of Iraq, and some limited form of justice had to wait until 2005 when the so-called ricin-plot terrorists were acquitted.⁵¹ It is also important to recall that other vital evidence to justify launching the destruction of Iraq was provided by Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi who after being tortured had confessed that al-Qaida was working with Saddam Hussain to obtain chemical and biological weapons to kill Americans; Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi however later retracted this fiction.

More Terrorists?

Dozens of lives were destroyed by Djamel Beghal’s unreliable confession including that of Nizar Trabelsi, who is featured as a so-called terrorist ringleader in *The Suicide Factory* –with Trabelsi being

⁵¹ Phillips and Evans, *Algeria*, p.285. As reported by Severin Carrell and Raymond Whitaker in their article “Ricin: The plot that never was” (*The Independent*, April 17, 2005): “Gareth Peirce, the human rights lawyer who acted for three of the acquitted men, claims that as ministers built up the fear of terrorist attack on Britain and prepared the public for the invasion of Iraq, the Government twice allowed largely unfounded scare stories to dominate the headlines - the ricin conspiracy and the alleged ‘poison gas’ attack on the London Underground.” For a useful examination of this so-called plot see the documentary film *Taking Liberties Since 1997* (2007).

accused of being Beghal's co-conspirator. As asserted in the book:

There was a strong foreign contingent among those who adopted the [Finsbury Park] mosque as their British retreat. One of them was Nizar Trabelsi, a lanky Tunisian and once a professional footballer in Germany, who was picked to be the first al-Qaeda suicide bomber to strike in Europe. He was arrested in September 2002, just days before he was supposed to drive a truck filled with explosives into a NATO base in Belgium. (p.92)

The Suicide Factory authors remain completely sure of this individuals guilt and write that during his trial Trabelsi had apparently “puffed out his chest and proudly declared how he had been chosen to become Europe’s first suicide bomber.”⁵² But in retrospect it seems that this boasting was false bravado, as while Trabelsi had indeed sided with the Taliban against US imperialism, and had made a confession in which he claimed he had “the will to become a martyr”, it also remained true that “before the court, he would declare that he decided to abandon the plan before any preparation or beginning of execution was made.” This version of events was told by Luk Vervaeet in his important article “Belgium: possible extradition of Nizar Trabelsi to the United State: another act of war?” (*Statewatch*, March 28, 2012). Vervaeet surmised:

Trabelsi, for his part, loyal to his reputation as an international football star, in the beginning readily and complacently assumed the role of iconic Islamic radical. But Trabelsi's personality has obviously none of the pure or hard characteristics attributed to an 'Al Qaeda warrior'. First of all, in general, well-known public figures such as Trabelsi are not known to be the ones who carry out the terrorist attacks. Trabelsi has no past history of militancy. He hasn't done harm to anyone, not even hurt a fly, not in Belgium, nor elsewhere in the world. If there was a plan, it seemed to be more the expression of a desperate will to do something spectacular than something strategically planned.

⁵² O'Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, p.226.

So, as in Beghal's own misplaced terror conviction, there is much more to Trabelsi's story than first meets the eye. What we know now is that after serving 10 years in a Belgium jail, in 2013 Trabelsi was illegally extradited to the United States to face another trial (for the same planned crime). He was then held in jail awaiting his trial for many years, with the case only being resolved in July 2023. It's outcome? Trabelsi was found innocent and cleared of all his previous supposed crimes.

In an interview with NBC News after the verdict, [Attorney Sabrina] Shroff said the jury's 'patience in going through the evidence led them to see what has been blatantly obvious to Mr. Trabelsi's lawyers — that law enforcement in Belgium took advantage of Mr. Trabelsi's vulnerabilities and wrongly extradited to the United States an innocent man.'⁵³

Trabelsi was therefore found to be innocent even though the evidence extracted from Beghal's torture had already been misused to 'prove' that Trabelsi had been one of Beghal's co-conspirators in plans to blow up the US embassy in Paris.⁵⁴ So, considering that Beghal has always asserted his innocence, now would seem like a good time to reevaluate all the court cases that were based upon Beghal's torture-derived confession including the incarceration of Britain's first two Al Qaida terrorists who were arrested in Leicester.⁵⁵ This should include the revisiting of another Leicester-related case linked to Beghal's

⁵³ Ryan Reilly and Ken Dilanian, "Ex-soccer star accused of plotting terror with Osama bin Laden found not guilty," *NBC News*, July 14, 2023.

⁵⁴ Jon Henley, "Paris plot reveals link to terror chief," *Guardian*, October 3, 2001.

⁵⁵ Evidence presented by Djamel Beghal proved fundamental in informing the British police operation, "Operation Magnesium," which resulted in 19 people being jailed for involvement in a terrorist linked money-laundering racket. Two of the accused ringleaders of this plot are famous as they were "Britain's first convicted al-Qaida terrorists". The latter two Algerian citizens convicted of bring terrorists in waiting being Illegal immigrants who had been found living in Leicester having fled their terror-torn homeland. "Al-Qaida terrorists jailed for 11 years," *Guardian*, April 1, 2003.

torture, which revolves around the incarceration of Kamel Daoudi, who after serving a long prison sentence in France still remains under life-long house arrest. Daoudi, who has always maintained his innocence, was convicted (like Trabelsi) of being Beghal's key accomplice in the plot to blow up the US embassy in Paris, with "the only evidence presented of a plot" being Beghal's confession – a confession that a later appeal court correctly "excluded because of concerns about the conditions under which it was obtained [ie. It had been extracted by torture]."⁵⁶

One other individual with ties to both Leicester and Beghal who was arguably falsely accused and convicted "of recruiting for al-Qaeda" but who has always insisted upon his innocence was David Courtailler, who also stood accused of being a "close contact" of Nizar Trabelsi.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Keith Richburg, "French court convicts 6 men of plotting to bomb embassy," *Seattle Times*, March 16, 2005; "European Race Bulletin," *Institute of Race Relations*, No.67, Spring 2009, p.13. Kamel Daoudi has recently published a book about his life titled *I Am Free... Within The Perimeter Assigned To Me* (2022).

⁵⁷ Emma Webb and Rupert Sutton, "An Enduring Threat: Europe's Islamist Terror Networks Then and Now," *Henry Jackson Society*, June 2018, p.82; David Sapsted, "Vet is convicted of kidnapping five children," *Daily Telegraph*, July 1, 2005; Colin Blackstock, "Al-Qaida member tells of kidnap," *Guardian*, April 21, 2005; Antony Barnett, Martin Bright and Nick Paton Walsh, "UK student's 'key terror role'," *Guardian*, October 28, 2001; Jon Henley, "Trial and terror," *Guardian*, March 18, 2004. David, like so many others, has always professed his innocence, and it has been suggested that David "seems to have been a willing if somewhat confused footsoldier" who was "alleged to have spent time in the al Qaida terrorist training camps". This same media report noted that David had admitted to "travelling to Afghanistan and around Europe," and added that "His lawyers will demand his acquittal: even if the inquiry has proved that he met a number of accused or suspected radical Islamists, they argue, there is nothing to prove that he ever helped plan, or even wanted to help plan, any terrorist attack."

During this trial, David "told the court that he converted to Islam in 1997 in the British resort of Brighton while fighting drug and alcohol addiction and that three days later a stranger gave him \$1,800 and a plane ticket to Afghanistan." The accusation made in court was that David had been given the money and ticket by people he had met at Abu Hamza's Finsbury Park

David's case is particularly interesting, because it was evidence presented at his trial that led to the prosecution of a Moroccan immigrant named Jamal Zougam for supposedly masterminding the Madrid train bombings of 2004,⁵⁸ and had also led to the false prosecution of a human rights lawyer named Omar Deghayes who ended up spending five years in Guantánamo Bay.⁵⁹ Finally, although

mosque so he could obtain terrorist training at "the notorious Khalden [training] camp in Eastern Afghanistan". Craig Smith, "Europe fears Islamic converts may give cover for extremism," *New York Times*, July 19, 2004. There is also the related case of David's brother Jérôme Courtailler, who while living with his brother in Leicester, allegedly converted to Islam "under Mr. Beghal's influence" and was arrested in 2001 in connection with the plot to blow up the US embassy in Paris. Jérôme however was acquitted of the so-called bomb plot but given a six month sentence for another terrorism-related charge. Craig Smith, "France sentences 3 to prison for aiding terrorists," *New York Times*, May 26, 2004; Jon Henley, "Trial and terror," *Guardian*, March 18, 2004.

⁵⁸ Jamal Zougam like many of the other suspects who were rounded up shortly after the Madrid train bombings of 2004 was detained for almost two years with the evidence against them cloaked in secrecy. This meant that for Zougam as with "most of the suspects" remanded in custody for so long, the "lawyers representing them could not really prepare an adequate defence strategy, as they had no information on the charges being brought against them." Furthermore, as reported in Helena Soletto Munoz's important 2017 article in the *New Journal of European Criminal Law*, in the case of the Madrid bombings investigation "all eyewitness identifications were preceded by the release of the suspects' photographs to the media". Thus the main evidence against Zougam was obtained by three allegedly reliable eyewitnesses. "The identification process took place in police stations, where a virtual identity parade was used: On a screen eyewitnesses were shown images of the suspects that had already been published in the newspapers." This meant that "The identification procedure carried out with regard to Mr. Zougam clearly did not comply with the minimum requirements needed to prevent incorrect identification". Furthermore, it has been asserted that "the identification of the accused, and more specifically that of Jamal Zougam, was one of the most questionable aspects of the case" made against the alleged bombers. Munoz, "The trial of the 11 March 2004 Madrid terrorist attacks," p.223, p.228, p.229.

⁵⁹ Omar Deghayes had been a human rights lawyer, whose mother had settled in Britain after her husband (who in 1980 had been "an opponent of the

there is no doubt that other convictions linked to Beghal's case deserve closer scrutiny, it would be remiss not to mention that it was evidence obtained from Beghal that led to Lotfi Raissi becoming the first person charged in connection with the 9/11 attacks. Raissi subsequently fought his case within the British legal system until 2010 when "the justice secretary, Jack Straw, finally admitted Raissi had been 'completely exonerated'.⁶⁰ But despite this success:

Raissi's experiences have left him emotionally scarred. He reports that while in Belmarsh [prison], he was verbally abused by both guards and inmates and accused of killing 7000 people. One guard told him 'We will feed you to the dogs.' Even after he was released, Raissi claims he is still followed and photographed. Following his arrest, Raissi lost his house; his wife lost her job with Air France; his brother's wife lost her job at Heathrow airport; his mother and brother fell ill and his father went into thousands of pounds of debt because of the case. Raissi has been unable to get another job in any airline in Europe or overseas due to the overzealous security services. 'My life has been destroyed, my reputation has been destroyed, my family has been destroyed.'⁶¹

increasingly totalitarian Gaddafi") had been murdered by the Libyan regime. Deghayes had later moved to Afghanistan but "Fearing for his new family's safety, he paid people-smugglers to get them all back to Pakistan in early 2002 after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan." Soon after he was detained in Guantánamo Bay, and eventually came to discover that the only evidence against him was that someone who looked slightly like him had featured "in an Islamic terrorist training video in Chechnya"; and so after five years he was released from his false internment at Guantánamo Bay because he was innocent. Yet while detained in Guantánamo another so-called terrorist named David Courtailler was accused of being linked to Deghayes and this so-called connection was used to implicate Deghayes as a so-called fellow terrorist. Smith, "Europe fears Islamic converts may give cover for extremism."

⁶⁰ Martin Bright *et al.*, "The secret war," *Guardian*, September 30, 2001; Afua Hirsch, "Lotfi Raissi case proves need for human rights," *Guardian*, April 25, 2010.

⁶¹ Fahad Ansari, "British anti-terrorism: a modern day witch-hunt," *Islamic*

... And The Manufactured War on Terrorism

Over recent decades Gareth Peirce has defended many Muslims who have been falsely accused of terrorism-related offences, but one of her first high-profile Muslim cases dates to the early 1990s when she represented two young Palestinians (Jawad Botmeh and Samar Alami) who were accused of bombing a Jewish charity building and the Israeli embassy in London. Tragically in 1996 both received twenty-year sentences even though they “had a cast-iron alibi” and “the case against them was riddled with inconsistencies.” Arguably the real reason they were found guilty is “because they had been trying to discover ways of making simple explosive devices, with mainly household ingredients, for use as a form of basic self-defence by Palestinian families.”⁶² This point was made by Mark Hollingsworth and Nick Fielding in their book *Defending the Realm: MI5 and the Shayler Affair* (1999). The authors continue:

The judge at their trial accepted that they had no links with

Human Rights Commission, October 2005 p.82; and for an earlier report into the wrongful persecution of Lotfi Raissi and others, see the Islamic Human Rights Commission’s 2002 report “The Hidden Victims of September 11: Prisoners of UK Law.”

⁶² For further details about this case, see Jawad Botmeh and Samar Alami’s campaign pamphlet, *Justice Denied* (1999) which was written by Daniel Guedella and included a foreword by Marxist journalist Paul Foot. Jawad and Samar were eventually released from prison in 2008 and 2009 respectively, although Jawad’s persecution by the authorities continued in later years when he was wrongly victimised because of his trade union activism.

Prior to representing Jawad and Samar, in a landmark case revolving around community self-defence, in 1982 Gareth Peirce had represented six members of the United Black Youth League in the Bradford Twelve trial. All who stood accused were acquitted and Peirce recalled: “There were twelve young men who extraordinarily and courageously decided to be armed to repel fascist attackers and were found by the police and charged. They took their courage to the courtroom and instead of denying it, which the prosecutor was expecting, stood up to be counted and said ‘we did it, of course, we did. We had to defend our community’.” For more on this case, see the documentary *Defiance: Fighting the Far Right* (2024).

any terrorist organisation. Their amateurish activities were also in sharp contrast to the bombings, which had been carried out professionally, so much so that the police forensics team could not even establish what explosive had been used. (p.146)

Yet with the passage of time the British state's persecution of Muslim so-called terrorists has only grown worse, especially in the wake of 9/11 and the construction of a "terrorism scare". As Peirce wrote in early 2003:

The terrorism scare is based, in disturbingly large part, on mythology, eg upon suggested alliances or links by Muslims worldwide with Al Qaeda. The fear is similar to the old Communism scare, except that the people targeted are more vulnerable because they are refugees, who might well be dead had they not fled. Those targeted cannot understand the basis of the scare as articulated. Many are now languishing in prison without any comprehension as to why.⁶³

This type of state-supported fearmongering is of course not restricted

⁶³ Gareth Peirce, "Terrorising communities," *Campaign Against Racism and Fascism*, Spring 2003. Later Peirce writes: "Any Muslim, who is a foreign national, can be targeted for internment. For example, some internees have been accused of helping Chechen resistance. The UN Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantee to all peoples a basic right of defence, including armed resistance as a last resort against tyranny as well as a right to self-determination. But even in the face of genocide, resistance is portrayed as part of a worldwide network of Islamic extremists and hence a route that leads the security service to its ever-present spectre of Al Qaeda. When politicians and prosecutors use this mythology, they are simply repeating what MI5 told them." She continues: "The internees have 'vanished. The government intends that no one should know about them. Most internees don't want their names mentioned in the press because they have families at risk in Egypt, Algeria, Morocco or Libya." For more details read the Campaign Against Criminalising Communities 2003 full report "Terrorising Minority Communities: 'Anti-Terrorism' Powers: their Use and Abuse."

to the injustices perpetrated by the British legal system, and a similar conclusion was reached by Professor Arun Kundnani in his book about American politics, *The Muslims Are Coming!: Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (2014). He summarised how:

In dedicating tens of billions of dollars a year to fighting a domestic threat of terrorist violence that is largely imagined, the US government has neglected the challenge of creating a genuinely peaceful society. An ideologically driven focus on Muslim Americans as the prime threat of violence goes hand in hand with a normalization of the fact that in the US fifteen thousand people are murdered each year. Indeed, the political scientist John Mueller has illustrated how our conception of the terrorist threat is shaped more by ideology than objectivity. He has calculated as follows: 'In almost all years the total number of people worldwide who die at the hands of international terrorists is not much more than the number who drown in bathtubs in the United States.' In the United Kingdom, despite the focus on al-Qaeda, the number of deaths caused by sectarianism in Northern Ireland over the last decade is similar to the number of lives lost in jihadist attacks. According to the University of Ulster, there were sixty-two deaths related to the conflict in Northern Ireland between 2002 and 2011. There were fifty-three deaths as a result of jihadist violence in the UK over the same period. (p.24)

Kundnani's book likewise provides an excellent overview of the evolution of counterterror policing in the UK, especially in relation to the government's authoritarian PREVENT program. In discussing these issues Kundnani is clear that:

The attempt to integrate policing with agencies of local government can be traced back to the early 1980s, with the reorganization of policing under Metropolitan Police Commissioner Kenneth Newman (who had previously served as chief constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Northern Ireland). New legislation sought to incorporate social and welfare agencies into the policing process. This was presented as a supportive form of 'community policing,' but its purpose was to embed police surveillance in schools and

other agencies providing public services. This new approach, of coordinating police work with social agencies, was reflected in the 1982 Police and Criminal Evidence Bill, which in its original version, proposed a power to search confidential records held by professionals.⁶⁴

Other researchers have written other important work on the same subject, and a significant contribution to this field is Trevor Aaronson's 2013 book *The Terror Factory: Inside the FBI's Manufactured War on Terrorism*. In synthesising his findings, Aaronson states that "the FBI's trawling in Muslim communities has resulted largely in sting operations that target easily susceptible men on the margins of society".

By August 2011, with nearly ten years of terrorism prosecutions since 9/11, we had a database of 508 defendants whom the U.S. government considered terrorists. The way the data broke down was illuminating. Of the 508 defendants, 243 had been targeted through an FBI informant, 158 had been caught in an FBI terrorism sting, and 49 had encountered an agent provocateur. Most of the people who didn't face off against an informant weren't directly involved with terrorism at all, but were instead Category II offenders, small-time criminals with distant links to terrorists overseas. Seventy-two of these Category II offenders had been charged with making false statements, while 121 had been prosecuted for immigration violations. Of the 508 cases, I could count on one hand the number of actual terrorists, such as failed New York City subway bomber Najibullah Zazi, who posed a direct and immediate threat to the United States.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Kundnani, *The Muslims are Coming*, p.175. For a first-hand account of how precrime demonises British Muslims, see Rizwaan Sabir's book *The Suspect: Counterterrorism, Islam and the Security State* (2022).

⁶⁵ Also see Jesse Norris and Hanna Grol-Prokopczyk, "Estimating the prevalence of entrapment in post-9/11 terrorism Cases," *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 105, 2015; "Illusion of Justice: Human Rights Abuses in US Terrorism Prosecution," Human Rights Watch, 2014; and for a brilliant satire on how the FBI acts to manufacture terrorist threats

Another relevant book is *Pre-crime: Pre-emption, Precaution and the Future* (2016) whose authors, Professors Jude McCulloch and Dean Wilson, conclude “that many of the deadly plots the [US] authorities claim to have pre-empted are products of police and intelligence agency activity.”⁶⁶

watch Chris Morris’ film *The Day Shall Come* (2019) which was based on 100 true FBI entrapment cases including the infamous trial of the “Liberty City Seven.”

Jesse Norris has observed that “The most well-known acquittal in a 1990s terrorism case was that of Randy Weaver of Ruby Ridge, Idaho. The informant posed as an extremist seeking weapon for his radical activities. Weaver repeatedly refused offers to make illegal sawed-off shotguns, and only succumbed to the inducements when financial problems left him desperate...His entrapment and the ensuing siege were among the main motivators of right-wing terrorism in the late 1990s.” Jesse Norris, “How entrapment still matters: partial successes of entrapment claims in terrorism prosecutions,” *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society*, 82, 2020, p.148.

A recent case of alleged entrapment revolves around the case of a Palestinian doctor based in Scotland called Issam Bassalat who has been “accused of addressing a high-ranking New IRA gathering” and argues that he “targeted and manipulated against his will by an MI5 agent”. Alan Erwin, “New IRA-accused doctor was ‘manipulated’ by MI5 agent Dennis McFadden, court told,” *Belfast Telegraph*, January 17, 2023.

⁶⁶ McCulloch and Wilson, the authors of *Pre-crime*, point out how “Informants can earn substantial sums. In the US, it is not uncommon for informants in counterterrorism pre-crime cases to make US\$100,000 for one case.” (p.115) They explain: “One of our major arguments is that countermeasures produce pre-crime. Informants and undercover agents represent a particularly stark example of this process. While the public hears news of plots successfully disrupted, it is evident that many such plots would not have been contemplated or discussed, let alone acted upon, had it not been for the dogged provocations and actions of informants.” (p.118)

A prime example of how the FBI infiltrate radical movements has been illustrated by the recent work of Trevor Aaronson, who outlined how in 2020 the authorities paid large amounts of money to a violent informant (and known paedophile) to enter the leadership of the BlackLivesMatter movement in Denver so he could encourage violence and offer military hardware to the protestors he was now leading (“FBI infiltrates the BLM movement w/ Trevor Aaronson,” *KPFA Radio*, February 16, 2023). On

This brings us back to the case of Abu Hamza, as we can see how the same types of dubious methods of prosecution were used by the US government to lock him up for life. Thus, after he was extradited to America, one of the key elements for which Hamza was convicted revolved around the accusation that he had sought “to set up a terrorist training camp” in Bly, Oregon. One of the most critical individuals involved in setting up this proposed camp had been Semi Osman, a one-time imam from Seattle who had relocated to live in a trailer with his family in the wilderness of Bly – the site of the so-called training camp. But amazingly despite being involved in such plans, Osman wasn’t aware that he might want to keep a low profile with the police, as in December 1999 while driving home to his trailer he was stopped by the local police because of a basic traffic violation. But this was not his first violation, it was his third violation in three weeks. And when the police reported the last incident to their headquarters, the FBI belatedly informed them that Osman was on their watchlist after going missing from his former home in Seattle. Next to no actions were subsequently taken by the authorities, which is even more intriguing as just the month before the British security services had contacted the Oregon police because they wanted to understand why Abu Hamza was now making regular phone calls to Bly.

It seems that this unusual inquiry from Britain’s intelligence agency had been prompted when an American Muslim named James Ujaama had called Hamza to tell him that Osman’s new backwater residence could serve as a perfect training camp for budding jihadists, particularly as Oregon was, as Ujaama put it, “a pro-militia and firearms state.” Yet little ever came of this underdeveloped plan. It is true that in late November 1999 Hamza had flew over two of his followers to investigate the project, but they had been wholly

another related issue, former Washington, D.C. police detective James Trainum’s book *How the Police Generate False Confessions: An Inside Look at the Interrogation Room* (2016) provides further insights into how the state sets up innocent people for crimes they never committed. Other well-known examples of such practices that have been made into important documentaries include *The Confessions* (2010), *The Central Park Five* (2012), and the Netflix series *Making a Murderer* (2015, 2018).

unimpressed with Ujaama or his proposed training site. But despite this failed hustle, Ujaama was to continue working closely with Hamza, travelling regularly between Seattle and London in an effort to help Hamza set up a web site and to help him popularise his militant sermons in the United States.⁶⁷ That might have been the end of the story of the failed training camp, but in July 2002 Ujaama was arrested on a firearms charge (in the United States) based upon evidence presented against him by “his old friend [Sem] Osman [who] had taken on the status of a ‘cooperating witness.’” This in turn led Ujaama to accept a plea bargain agreement with the US government in return for his cooperating with their anti-terror persecutions over the next decade.⁶⁸ (Here it is worth noting that “Among the Islamic State-related

⁶⁷ James Ujaama had established contact with Hamza’s mosque after first travelling to the UK in early 1999, and as Ujaama “had an American passport, and could travel widely without hindrance; during a three-year period when he had no identifiable source of income he travelled between the United States and London on eleven occasions.” The two individuals from Hamza’s inner circle who were tasked with checking out the potential training site (in November/December 1999) were Haroon Rashid Aswat and Oussama Abdullah Kassir. In February 2000, Ujaama “having completely fallen out with Aswat and Kassir” then returned to the Finsbury Park mosque to help Hamza launch a new website (Supporters of Shariah). O’Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, pp.185-7, p.188, p.194.

⁶⁸ O’Neill and McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, p.199. “Ujaama is forbidden from talking publicly about the case, but according to the US website TalkLeft he maintained at the time of his sentencing that the Bly ranch was not intended as a terrorist facility.” (*The Suicide Factory*, p.199) It is significant that even in a court case with such a high-profile Islamist the US government’s trial still relied upon using their own favoured (highly paid) so-called terrorism experts with the most notable one being Evan Kohlmann, a man whose “critics describe him as a huckster.” Kohlmann’s mentor was another terror expert named Steven Emerson, who in 2015 said on *FoxNews* that Birmingham, England, was a “Muslim-only city” where non-Muslims “don’t go in”: this is total rubbish, albeit Islamophobic rubbish that was later repeated by Donald Trump. Kohlmann was also involved in presenting evidence to prosecute the famous case of Salim Hamdan that was immortalised in the documentary *The Oath* (2012). In this instance the Pentagon had paid Kohlmann to produce a 90-minute film exhibiting the true horrors of al-Qaeda in order to scare the jury into convicting Hamdan; this

cases, the average sentence after pleading guilty was 10 years, while the average sentence upon conviction at trial was 30 years.”⁶⁹

In addition to the training camp fiasco, it remains highly significant that the evidence used to convince a jury that Hamza gave “other support to terrorists” in Afghanistan rested on the word of a “al-Qaida operative turned government informant” named Saajid Badat. Although not properly investigated at the time, a report in the *Guardian* made what should have been a stunning revelation when it stated that one of the alleged terrorist fighters that Hamza had sent to Afghanistan (in December 2000) was a young man called Feroz Abbasi – an individual who became caught up in Hamza’s story

issue is covered in Jonathan Mahler’s book *The Challenge: Hamdan V. Rumsfeld and the Fight Over Presidential Power* (2008).

For more on Kohlmann, see Trevor Aaronson, “Doogie Huckster: A terrorism expert’s secret relationship with the FBI,” *The Intercept*, July 27, 2015; and for a broader discussion of flaky terror experts, see Magnus Ranstorp, “Mapping terrorism studies after 9/11: An academic field of old problems and new prospects,” in: Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, Jeroen Gunning (eds.), *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda* (2009), pp.26-30; Alexander George, “The discipline of terrorology,” in: Alexander George (ed.), *Western State Terrorism* (1991); Edward Herman, *The Real Terror Network: Terrorism in Fact and Propaganda* (1982); and Lisa Stampnitzky, *Disciplining Terror: How Experts Invented ‘Terrorism’* (2013).

More recently James Ujaama completed a PhD at Walden University under the name Earnest Ujaama for a thesis titled “Modern Black Codes: Presidential Crime Control Rhetoric and Modern Black Codes” (2021). In his thesis he notes: “Throughout this research, I assumed a postmodernist perspective. Postmodernism posits that there are no absolutes, and that reality or truth is subjective.” (p.16) Apparently due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he writes I “conducted my study from a hotel room in Saudi Arabia”. (p.85) A useful examination of Ujaama’s involvement with Hamza is recounted in Aaronson’s article “The cooperators,” *The Intercept*, April 20, 2017.

⁶⁹ Jesse Norris, “How entrapment still matters: partial successes of entrapment claims in terrorism prosecutions,” *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society*, 82, 2020, p.158.

because he had worked as a volunteer at the Finsbury Park mosque before buying a one-way ticket to Afghanistan so he could live there.⁷⁰ This was the same British citizen who had been “held at Guantánamo Bay for three years before being released without charge in 2005.” Abbasi was clearly not an al-Qaida operative, but during Hamza’s trial Badat had falsely asserted that he had met Abbasi “at al-Qaida training camps in Afghanistan, and witnessed him talking to leaders about carrying out attacks”.⁷¹ Given the nature of this seemingly false testimony, it is fitting that another of Badat’s terrorism related testimonies proved vital in imprisoning Nizar Trabelsi. As one uncritical so-called terrorism expert admits: Badat’s decision to agree to testify “provided prosecutors in the United States with a very useful witness in a number of trials, as well as providing British investigators with a wealth of information and detail about jihadist structures in the United Kingdom.”⁷² The so-called expert making this statement evidently didn’t care to much about accuracy!

Thus, with the help of well-rewarded informants like Saajid Badat, innocent people like Feroz Abbasi were transformed into terrorists simply owing to the fact that they had the misfortune to be present in Afghanistan in the period before the War on Terror had been launched. The details of this horrifying story of torture and the scale of wrongful convictions have been described in Andy Worthington’s book *The Guantanamo Files: The Stories of the 759*

⁷⁰ After the launching of the war on Afghanistan Feroz Abbasi became one of the first batch of detainees to be illegally held and tortured in Guantánamo Bay, in his case only to be released some three years later. By 2011 Abbasi went on to become an employee of the human rights group CAGE. Abbasi recounts his tragic story in an online interview conducted for the “Rule of Law Oral History Project” on May 31, 2011. Interviews with many other Guantánamo Bay detainees as part of this project can be found online; as can a related interview with Gareth Peirce.

⁷¹ Karen McVeigh, “Former al-Qaida operative turned informant testifies in Abu Hamza trial,” *Guardian*, April 28, 2014. As later reported elsewhere: “At Hamza’s trial, Badat said that he saw Abbasi at an al-Qaida training camp in 2001, but admitted under cross examination that he had only seen him digging holes with a spade.”

⁷² Raffaello Pantucci, *We Love Death As You Love Life’: Britain’s Suburban Terrorists* (2015), p.148.

Detainees in America's Illegal Prison (2007). As the author writes:

In contrast to the [US] administration's claims that the Guantánamo prisoners are the 'worst of the worst,' what the stories reveal most of all—filtered through the horrendous abuse to which they have been subjected—is that very few of them had anything to do with 9/11 or al-Qaeda, and the vast majority were either Taliban foot soldiers, recruited to fight an inter-Muslim civil war in Afghanistan that began long before 9/11, or humanitarian aid workers, religious teachers and economic migrants, who were, for the most part, sold to the Americans by their allies in Afghanistan and Pakistan. (p.xiii)

Spreading Violence and the Martyring of Anwar al-Awlaki

Few Islamists ever become household names, but one that did is Anwar al-Awlaki: an imam whose global notoriety is derived from the fact that on September 30, 2011, he became the first US citizen to be the victim of an extrajudicial execution. Awlaki's own radicalisation and the powerful influence he has exerted on Muslims deserves examination for many reasons, but especially because at one stage he was considered by the US government to be the type of moderate Muslim that they thought they could work with. This lesser known fact concerning his life first became apparent in late 2001 when Awlaki, a well-known Salafi imam and then current PhD student,...

...denounced the 9/11 attacks but in the same breath would criticize America's record in the Middle East. Reporters were impressed. *The New York Times* wrote that Awlaki, just 30, was being 'held up as a new generation of Muslim leader capable of merging East and West.' He relished the spotlight. He seemed to be quite self-consciously auditioning for a dual role: explainer of Islam to America and of America to Muslims. 'We came here to build, not to destroy,' he declared from his pulpit. 'We are the bridge between America and one billion Muslims worldwide.'⁷³

⁷³ Scott Shane, "The lessons of Anwar al-Awlaki," *New York Times*, August 27, 2015.

The US government's official courtship continued in the following months and on February 5, 2002, Awlaki was a guest at a Pentagon Muslim outreach luncheon. This was because as far as the American government was concerned Awlaki was a model citizen whose conservative, religious brand of politics chimed with the evangelical Christian fundamentalism that dominated their own state apparatus.⁷⁴ His accommodating, albeit critical, orientation however was not to last, as he became radicalised by the increasingly outrageous attacks reigned upon Muslims worldwide. Thus, on March 22, just days after the FBI had undertaken a series of particularly authoritarian raids on the Muslim community in Awlaki's hometown (as part of "Operation Green Quest") his newfound fury came to the fore in his latest sermon. As he put it:

So this is not now a war on terrorism. We need to all be clear about this. This is a war against Muslims. It is a war against Muslims and Islam. Not only is it happening worldwide, but it is happening right here in America, that is claiming to be fighting this war for the sake of freedom while it's infringing on the freedom of its own citizens, just because they're Muslim....

Maybe the next day the Congress will pass a bill that Islam is illegal in America. Don't think that this is a strange thing to

⁷⁴ Matthew Taylor, *Scripture People: Salafi Muslims in Evangelical Christians' America* (2023). As Scott Shane points out in his book *Objective Troy: A Terrorist, a President, and the Rise of the Drone* (2015), at the end of 2000 Awlaki had been offered his job at the Dar Al-Hijrah mosque in Falls Church, Virginia, in part because its leaders "were worried about the dangers of radicalization" then posed by another "charismatic bioscientist named Ali al-Timimi" who was based at the nearby Dar al Arqam mosque. Timini "was drawing young people with a hard line: that voting was *haram*—forbidden by Islamic law—because it elevated man's law over God's law, and that serving in the American military was outlawed because US forces might fight against Muslims. Dar Al-Hijrah, though its leaders might express strong anti-Israel views and oppose social equality for women, took a far more accommodating stance toward American life. For some young people with an assertive approach to their faith, the mosque's leaders were far too accommodating." (p.64)

happen; anything is probable in the world of today, because there are no rights unless there's a struggle for those rights, and the history of America in that sense is very clear. African Americans in this country had to go through a struggle; their rights were not handed to them... that's how slavery ended, and the struggle has to continue.⁷⁵

Inspired by the radical legacy of American Muslims like Malcolm X, Awlaki was drawing a direct comparison between the Civil Rights Movement and the 'jihad' (struggle). But the emphasis Awlaki placed upon these linkages was not a new idea for him, as just days before 9/11 Awlaki had given a speech "at the fund-raiser for Jamil al-Amin, the former H. Rap Brown, a prominent leader in the black liberation movement of the 1960s." Thus, it made sense that in his March 22 sermon Awlaki once again "held up African Americans as a model for American Muslim empowerment and actually mentioned the case of al-Amin, whom he portrayed as an innocent man facing unfair murder charges."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Cited in Taylor, *Scripture People*, pp.168-9.

⁷⁶ Shane, *Objective Troy*, p.118. In the 1960s H. Rap Brown the one-time head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) had been one of the many targets of the FBI repressive Counterintelligence Program when he had campaigned for "the right of African Americans to engage in armed self-defense against white racist violence". H. Rap Brown converted to Islam while in prison in the 1970s and changed his name to Jamil al-Amin and went on to become a Salafi imam. However, in March 2000 Al-Amin was accused of killing a sheriff's deputy, and in 2002, in an extremely controversial case he was found guilty and given a life sentence. For more on this case, see Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, "H. Rap Brown/Jamil Al-Amin: A profoundly American story," *The Nation*, February 28, 2002; the Slate podcast "A Black Power radical's rise and fall" (December 22, 2023); and Mauri Saalakhian, *The Imprisonment of Imam Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin: Is It A Government Conspiracy?* (2020). On a very related point, the author of the latter book, Mauri Saalakhian, is playing a leading role in the campaign for the release of Dr Aafia Siddiqui – a Muslim who appears to have been falsely imprisoned in the War on Terror. For more on this case, see Petra Bartosiewicz, "The intelligence factory: how America makes its enemies disappear," *Harper's magazine*, November 2009.

Like al-Amin and many other vocal activists before him, Awlaki had good reasons for being fearful of the FBI. This is because in the wake of 9/11 the federal authorities had been tracking his every move. Then just a few days after he'd delivered his "war against Muslims" speech Awlaki found out that the FBI had reopened a file on him that revolved around his routine and secret use of prostitutes – a fact that if publicly revealed would likely destroy his life as an imam.⁷⁷ Awlaki's past dalliances with prostitutes were now coming back to haunt him. This is because at the time only he and the FBI knew his well-maintained secret that in 1996 and 1997 he had been "arrested for soliciting undercover police officers posing as prostitutes" while later being "charged for loitering near a school" which led to him being sentenced to three years' probation and a fine.⁷⁸ It is therefore easy to understand why Awlaki felt pressured to flee to Britain just days after he learnt that the FBI were following him again.

Once in the relative safety of England Awlaki now became further incensed by the ongoing War on Terror and split his time between lecturing and spending time with some of his wealthy relatives. Yet America still called to him, and in October he made a brief journey home with his family. During this visit Awlaki engaged in a "mysterious nighttime encounter" with his old religious rival Dr Ali al-Timimi, who in response to the unannounced visit said he had sent Awlaki packing when he had started pestering him about recruiting Western jihadists. Just a few years later Timimi would receive a life sentence for allegedly doing just this – although the evidence presented against him was dubious. It is also notable that in the process of challenging his conviction, his lawyers had said that

⁷⁷ Awlaki told his brother Ammar "I was told that the F.B.I. has a file on me, and this file could destroy my life. I'm now rethinking my options, and one of them might be as drastic as leaving the States." Although he didn't tell his brother what was in the files, "the manager of an escort service called Awlaki to warn him that he had been interviewed by Wade Ammerman, an F.B.I. agent, who had asked about the imam's visits to prostitutes." Cited in Shane, "The lessons of Anwar al-Awlaki."

⁷⁸ Shane, *Objective Troy*, p.63. "In 1999, alarmed by his contacts with suspected militants, the FBI opened an investigation, closing the inquiry with no charges the following year."

Timimi had “found Awlaki’s conduct odd” and had “suspect[ed] that he was wearing a wire and working for the FBI.”⁷⁹

Whatever the ultimate reason for Awlaki’s fleeting visit to America, he was soon back in London speaking out against oppression and was in the process of embracing an increasingly violent interpretation of his faith. In late 2003, while in England, Awlaki then apparently tried to reach out to the FBI to arrange a meeting to “clear up any suspicions” about ongoing smears linking him to the events of 9/11, but no meeting with the FBI ever eventuated. It was not too long after this, in early 2004, that Awlaki relocated to Yemen where his father was a well-connected scholar and politician. In the Yemen Awlaki then continued his religious lecturing until he was arrested on August 31, 2006, and subsequently held in prison without trial for 18 months. Awlaki was eventually released without charge; and it is thought that this long period of detention was linked to the Yemeni authorities doing a favour for the US government, as just eight months prior to Awlaki’s arrest the FBI had reopened its investigation into his political activities.

In the coming years Awlaki would continue to make pioneering use of new social media outlets to reach out to English-speaking Muslims across the world. And during this time his militancy only increased, such that by early 2009 his public position had evolved to “open embrace of violent jihad” meaning that his “worldview now perfectly matched that of al-Qaeda.”⁸⁰ It was around then that Awlaki

⁷⁹ Jeremy Seahill, *Dirty Wars: The World Is A Battlefield* (2013), p.71; Shane, *Objective Troy*, p.125. In 2004 Timimi was indicted and then the following year received a life sentence for being the so-called spiritual leader of the Virginia Paintball Jihad Network. Many of members of this network accepted plea bargain agreements and testified against Timimi in what appears to be another faulty Islamophobic verdict, see Milton Viorst, “The education of Ali Al-Timimi,” *The Atlantic*, June 2006; and Jonathan Turley’s forthcoming book *The Indispensable Right: Free Speech in an Age of Rage* (2024).

⁸⁰ Shane, *Objective Troy*, p.239. In June 2010 Awlaki released the first issue of a new English language online magazine title *Inspire* which openly promoted the violent objectives of al-Qaeda, see Peter Garrard Beck, “Identity, Allegiance and Death: Inspire and the Case of Anwar al Awlaki,”

is alleged to have joined the newly formed al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP),⁸¹ and shortly thereafter (in September 2011) he was assassinated by a drone attack. This murder proved controversial for many reasons not least because within sane circles – which even extended to commentary published on far-right media channels like *Fox News* – it was understood that executing such an influential US citizen would only elevate their influence as a martyr. This prediction was confirmed by the *New York Times* who in 2015 determined that “Awlaki’s pronouncements seem to carry greater authority today than when he was living, *because America killed him.*”⁸²

The Expansion of Jihadist Wars

With Awlaki eliminated, the problems associated with the growth of violent Islamic extremism were no closer to being resolved – especially given that the War on Terror was being fuelled by the anti-democratic actions of combatants on both sides of the conflict. In the Yemen this troubling situation has been explored in depth by establishment

MA Thesis submitted to the University of Minnesota, December 2013.

⁸¹ Helen Lackner writes in her book *Yemen: Poverty and Conflict* (2022): “In 2009, after al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia had suffered serious setbacks at home, many of its members and leaders moved to Yemen, and the two groups joined to form al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which has been active ever since, primarily in Yemen, though it has claimed responsibility for a few actions in Saudi Arabia. Since the war started in 2015, AQAP was said to have taken control of Mukalla and coastal Hadhramaut in the summer of 2015. Contrary to claims by the Saudi-led coalition, its members left a year later by negotiating with the coalition, taking heavy weapons as well as plenty of the cash acquired through port fees, taxation and bank raids during that time. Since then, AQAP has carried out occasional attacks mostly in remote locations and against official government or separatist forces in the southern part of Yemen. There are strong indications of some cooperation between AQAP and both coalition and separatist forces, each accusing the other of working with jihadis.” (p.50) Lackner adds: “Even today, it is the ‘threat’ posed by the presence of a few AQAP militants in remote rural regions which is the justification, if not the real reason, for UAE and US continued military presence in parts of southern Yemen.” (p.135)

⁸² Shane, “The lessons of Anwar al-Awlaki.”

historian Alex de Waal. In his book *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power* (2015) Waal explained how:

For a decade, Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh ably used the threat of al-Qaeda-linked insurgents to maintain generous American security assistance. Saleh compared ruling Yemen to 'dancing on the heads of snakes' and, on the eve of the Arab Spring, Sarah Phillips described [in her 2011 book] how 'crisis has kept the system running, and has been, to a significant degree, a deliberate choice of Yemen's power elite'. Solving the security crisis by defeating al-Qaeda was not in Saleh's interest, as he discovered in late 2005 when his near-complete defeat of the jihadists resulted, not in American accolades and rewards, but in cutbacks in security aid and criticism over corruption. Saleh was more threatened by a diminished political budget than by Islamist militants, and it is probably no coincidence that three months later, twenty-three militants escaped from a maximum-security prison, some of whom 'went on to establish al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, putting Yemen's problem with militant jihadis back on the international agenda'.⁸³

This analysis summarises one significant problem in the so-called War on Terror. Furthermore, while the US government was fixated on blaming jihadist violence in Somalia on the contribution made by al-Qaeda's forces in the nearby Yemen⁸⁴ - which is just located on the

⁸³ In addition, Waal points out that "in 2011, US counter-terror legislation impeded relief agencies' operations in al Shabaab-controlled areas, at the cost of seriously delaying an international response to a disaster that cost as many as 250,000 lives. American restrictions on banks transferring money to Somalia are also threatening the flows of remittances." For a more up-to-date analyses, see Alex de Waal, "Pax Africana or Middle East Security Alliance in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea?," *World Peace Foundation*, Occasional Paper No. 17, January 2019.

⁸⁴ A prime example of the US government's attempt to blame the radicalisation of Somali Muslims on Yemeni terrorists is provided in the reporting around their much-trumped April 2011 capture of Ahmed

Abdulkadir Warsame – an alleged “military commander with the Shabab” who in his plea statement admitted that “while fighting as a soldier on behalf of Al Shabab... at least one person died in Somalia.” (p.26) Warsame’s case was important as he was picked up while travelling to Somalia from the Yemen on a small skiff and then detained and questioned for two months on board US Navy amphibious assault ship, the USS Boxer. Apparently Warsame gave his American interrogators useful information, and although he initially pleaded “not guilty” he subsequently changed his mind and “in a closed court proceeding” held in December 2011 pleaded guilty to all the terrorism charges that had been laid against him. Warsame then received a light sentence after agreeing to cooperate with the US authorities in their terrorist investigations (this apparently involved him divulging information concerning Awlaki’s whereabouts).

It seems that Warsame had been captured because of the activities of a CIA informant named Morten Storm who was working to penetrate various terrorist groups who subsequently wrote about his life in the book *Agent Storm: My Life Inside al Qaeda and the CIA* (2014). In this autobiography the former criminal, turned Islamist, turned spy, recalled how he had first befriended Awlaki while based in Yemen in early 2006, but later in the year decided to turn against his former Islamist friends by working for a variety of intelligence agencies. Storm recalled how in late 2006 he had first befriended Warsame who he described as a “wiry teenager” and explained how in early 2007 he “handed him £600 in cash” (with the backing of MI5) so Warsame could purchase a one-way ticket from Birmingham to Somalia (which he did). Sometime later in the year Storm then told Awlaki to phone Warsame who was apparently fighting for Al-Shabaab in Somalia. Warsame picked up the phone and Storm recalled that “Awlaki seemed elated” and the “two exchanged email addresses and mobile-phone numbers.” Later Warsame was arrested at sea, and in his court hearing he confessed that he had actually “joined Al Shabab to fight the Ethiopian invasion of my native country, Somalia.” (Note: the violent Ethiopian invasion had been secretly backed by the US government.) Apparently “Warsame has yet to appear as a witness in an American trial though in at least six cases in Minnesota, Brooklyn and Manhattan, the threat of his testimony appears to have helped persuade defendants to plead guilty.”

One of the alleged terrorists that Warsame outed to the authorities was Mohamed Ibrahim Ahmed, who “eventually pleaded guilty... to conspiring to support Al Shabab” and because of this Warsame was not needed to be called upon to testify against him in court. The *New York Times* reported that: “Sabrina Shroff, a lawyer for Mr. Ahmed, said it ‘boggles the mind’ that

other side of the Gulf of Aden – it seems that the real reason undergirding the rise of extremism in Somalia owed far more to Western power politics. Supporting this argument, a US government report published in 2010 made the point that “US intelligence analysts have argued since the mid-1990s that Somalia is fundamentally inhospitable to foreign jihadist groups.” But having stated this fact, the report went on to argue that al-Qaeda’s new “foothold in Somalia has probably been facilitated by the involvement of Western powers and

prosecutors would have used Mr. Warsame against her client, adding, ‘It’s like you’re using the consigliere as a snitch against the soldier.’” Ahmed, who was originally from Eritrea, remained an unusual and controversial case as he had travelled from Sweden (where he was a permanent resident) to allegedly fight in Somalia against the Ethiopian invasion, but after being captured in Nigeria, in 2009, he was then extradited to the US where he received a 9 year sentence in 2013. As the *New York Times* reported at the time of his trial: “Lawyers for Mr. Ahmed have asked a judge to suppress statements that the United States government has said he made after waiving his Miranda rights and being interrogated by the F.B.I. in Nigeria. They claim that any such waiver was not voluntary and thus any statements he made are inadmissible.” Furthermore, after his conviction it was reported that his lawyer said “Given his nonexistent connections with the United States, and his complete lack of animosity toward its people, I am very disappointed with the sentence”. (Two other known individuals to be convicted as a result of evidence provided by Warsame were Minh Quang Pham and Lawal Olaniyi Babafemi.)

In Storm’s spy book, the author boasted about securing the conviction of a so-called terrorist named Hassan Tabbakh in late 2007. However, as Philip Edwards – a more critical commentator – observed: Tabbakh “received a seven-year sentence for preparing acts of terrorism, on the grounds of possessing chemicals with the intention of making bombs – although Tabbakh did not have a detonator, and the chemicals would not have ignited in any case.” Edwards continues, contrast this sentence with the case of Ryan McGee who “was a serving soldier and English Defence League supporter who kept a home-made bomb in his bedroom, for which he received a two-year sentence on an explosives charge. (Unlike Tabbakh’s bomb, McGee’s was fully constructed and viable.)” Philip Edwards, “Britain’s new counter-terrorism legislation will undermine the rule of law even further,” Manchester Metropolitan University, October 29, 2018.

their allies.”⁸⁵ This tragic conclusion being further aggravated by the report’s appreciation that “Weapons and explosives from Yemen, where gunrunners operate with impunity, often find their way to Somalia”.

In his book *Dirty Wars: The World Is A Battlefield* (2013), American journalist Jeremy Scahill traces the relations between the violent Islamic movements in the Yemen and Somalia. But Scahill is clear that the violence in Somalia was not caused by the violence in the Yemen. Instead Scahill concludes that:

Somalia could have turned out very differently from the country the United States and its warlords helped create after 9/11. Radical Islam was new to Somalia and was not widespread prior to the launch of the Global War on Terror. Many seasoned Somalia analysts believed that the handful of radicals in the country could have been contained and that the central aim of stabilizing the country should have been to disarm and disempower the warlords. Instead, Washington directly supported an expansion of their power and, in the process, caused a radical backlash in Somalia, opening the doors wide for al-Qaeda to step in.

Scahill goes on to state:

By 2004, the [Central Intelligence] Agency’s outsourced Somalia campaign was laying the groundwork for a spectacular series of events that would lead to an almost unthinkable rise in the influence of al-Qaeda in the Horn of Africa. But it wasn’t the CIA’s warlord program alone that would spur a major uprising in Somalia. The civilian tolls the wars were taking in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the abuses at Abu Ghraib

⁸⁵ Committee on Foreign Relations, “Al Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A ticking time bomb,” A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, One Hundred Eleventh Congress, Second Session, January 21, 2010. Citing a 2009 produced by the US foreign policy analyst Bronwyn Bruton titled “In the quicksands of Somalia: where doing less helps more” (*Foreign Affairs*), the US government report added:” In fact, according to Bruton, the terrorist threat posed by Somalia has grown in proportion to the intrusiveness of international policies toward the country.”

and Guantánamo, gave credence to the perception that the United States was waging a war against Islam. While the United States backed its own warlords in Mogadishu, Washington's post-9/11 actions led to the formation of a coalition of former warlords and religious movements that would challenge the rule of the US proxies in Somalia. It was blowback sparked by US policies in Somalia and abroad.⁸⁶

Similar points were acknowledged in 2011 by establishment foreign policy analysts, John Norris and Bronwyn Bruton, who reminded their readers how:

The U.S. government generously contributed to the Siad Barre [dictatorial] regime in Somalia during the 1980s. Barre's government was widely recognized as horrible when it came to democracy and human rights, but aid was showered upon Barre because he was seen as an important Cold War ally and a bulwark against Soviet expansionism in the region.

Today, the United States, in pursuit of its modern counterterror objectives, provides continuous indirect financial and military support to Somalia's Transitional Federal Government despite its proven record of corruption, rampant and admitted use of child soldiers, and frequent inability to maintain control of territory. In fact, the TFG's record of governance is probably worse than Siad Barre's in

⁸⁶ Related forms of Islamic radicalisation were evolving in Nigeria. I make this point in my 2021 book *The Givers That Take: the US and British-backed "Nigerian government was widely seen to be utterly corrupt, and as a direct consequence of the failure of the trade union movement to organize to pose a real alternative to the bankrupt status quo far-right religious groups like Boko Haram were able to fill the void particularly in the Northern regions. But rather than address any of the urgent economic needs of the poor that had pushed them into the arms of religious extremists, the government simply intervened with brutal military force against the religious uprising ordering the extrajudicial murder of the leader of Boko Haram in July 2009. This action only inflamed local tensions in the region, driving even more people into the orbit of what in the following months and years would soon become a terrifying terrorist insurgency."* (p.202)

many regards.⁸⁷

As we know now, in the following years it was the mainly indigenous response of Somalians to decades of foreign-backed violence that led to the rise of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) – a group whose forces would eventually morph into al-Shabab, which itself had previously served as the UIC’s radical rump.⁸⁸ Their rise to regional influence would even lead Awlaki to author a blog post (on December 21, 2008) titled “Salutations to al-Shabab of Somalia,” wherein Awlaki celebrated their violent victories and noted “The ballot has failed us but the bullet has not.” Ironically, shortly after this post was published the US government’s favoured ally in the Yemen, President Saleh, decided to release “176 of the men taken into custody over the years

⁸⁷ John Norris and Bronwyn Bruton, “Twenty years of collapse and counting the cost of failure in Somalia,” *Center for American Progress*, September 14, 2011. For a useful introduction to the brutality of US foreign policy objectives in Somalia, see Lee Wengraf, *Extracting Profit: Imperialism, Neoliberalism and the New Scramble for Africa* (2018); and for a discussion of the human consequences of America’s undeclared war on Somalia, see Ben Rawlence, *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World’s Largest Refugee Camp* (2016). The British government has of course played its own equally toxic role in Somali affairs; although in the following article Michael Jones attempts to put a positive spin on these interventions, see “Mogadishu: an appraisal of UK engagement in Somalia,” RUSI Occasional Paper, June 2023.

⁸⁸ As Mohamed Haji Ingiriis notes in his important *Third World Quarterly* article “From Al-Itihaad to Al-Shabaab: how the Ethiopian intervention and the ‘War on Terror’ exacerbated the conflict in Somalia” (2018): “The US decision to support the warlords brought together discrete groups, mainly former Al-Itihaad members, who united to fend off the warlords, empowered by the West to balance the growing power of the militant Islamic movements. This was also the case in Afghanistan where the US forged a close relationship with the warlords who had inflicted so much destruction and damage to the Afghan society. The war with the US-funded warlords in Somalia implicated the UIC directly in the War on Terror. Although they were increasingly popular from the outset, the UIC leaders lost the support they enjoyed when they defeated the warlords who were considered puppets for the US in the eyes of the Somali public who came to consider them as paid agents of the CIA.” (p.11)

on suspicion of being linked to al-Qaeda.”⁸⁹

Moving to the present, the War on Terror has achieved little except enriching a few members of a global ruling elite, while boosting political instability for everyone else. Yemen has been trapped in a brutal civil war since 2014, with the US and UK governments arming an unholy coalition headed by the militaristic regimes of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, all of whom have now thrown their military muscle behind President Saleh’s despotic successor.⁹⁰ The Taliban “swept into Kabul [in August 2021] just as American troops pulled out, ending a 20-year occupation that left Afghanistan in the hands of the very militants Washington had ousted.”⁹¹ In Iraq, US

⁸⁹ Scahill, *Dirty Wars*. In contrast to establishment historians, Scahill argues that Awlaki’s direct control over al-Qaeda’s terrorist activities has never been firmly established. He writes: “Although Awlaki was developing relationships with various al-Qaeda figures in Shabwah and elsewhere, and his status was rising within its ranks, well-connected Yemenis who had interviewed AQAP leaders told me that he was not an operational member of the group. ‘Anwar al Awlaki was not a leader in al-Qaeda, he did not hold any official post at all,’ said journalist Abdul Rezzaq al Jamal. He told me that AQAP viewed Awlaki as an ally and that ‘the thing that united him and al-Qaeda is the hostility to the US.’” (p.363) This is an important point because most mainstream reporters and historians take at face value the questionable evidence presented by violent jihadists who were proud of their alleged personal connections to Awlaki. One prominent establishment historian who overstates Awlaki’s formal ties to al-Qaeda is Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, author of the 2020 book *Incitement: Anwar al-Awlaki’s Western Jihad*.

⁹⁰ Owen Jones, “Why is the UK government still getting away with complicity in the Yemen war?,” *Guardian*, January 20, 2022. Writing in January 2024, Alex de Waal correctly states that the one thing that unites all the Arab Gulf kingdoms is that they “all want to suppress democracy movements.” And, as he adds, the UAE is a “key actor” in the region that “has long had a free pass in Washington.” This is significant in light of recent news about the UAE’s involvement in a longstanding plot to assassinate their opponents in the Yemen. Alex De Waal and Mulugeta Gebrehiwot, “Red Sea is today’s arena for clash of African-Arab power politics,” *Responsible Statecraft*, January 9, 2024.

⁹¹ Julie Turkewitz, “The U.S. left them behind,” *New York Times*, May 21, 2023.

military occupiers remain while the democratic aspirations of ordinary people remain unfulfilled. An Iraqi state apparatus has been reconstituted that has...

... all the trappings of a liberal democracy – elections, free press, parliament, a free market – and yet its lethargic, inflated administration, wrapped in archaic bureaucratic rules and regulations and fossilised hierarchies, behaves like other Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes. It is a wealthy, oil-exporting country, whose citizens live in poverty without employment, an adequate health-care system, electricity or drinking water, where sectarian parties and their militias have built statelets of corruption, and fiefdoms of commercial interests within the state, and where a new class of the super-wealthy—the so-called whales of corruption—have emerged with a panache for spending fortunes in nightclubs and private gambling rooms.⁹²

Following 9/11, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were slaughtered and the coalition forces deliberately intensified sectarian divisions amongst the remaining Muslims. Moreover, learning nothing from the UK government's policy of internment as applied in Northern Ireland, Iraq's governing forces contained their enemies within the sprawling prison complex of Camp Bucca. A hellish prison that served as "a vast centre of indoctrination and training – a 'jihadi university' – for the 100,000 detainees forced to live there between 2004 and 2009."⁹³ It was from the ranks of these enraged prisoners that ISIS obtained its leaders and foot soldiers, which in turn facilitated the rapid growth of

⁹² Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, *A Stranger in Your Own City: Travels in the Middle East's Long War* (2023).

⁹³ This point is made in Michael Griffin's book, *Islamic State: Rewriting History* (2016). He states: "With tacit US approval, the emirs transformed Camp Bucca into a vast centre of indoctrination and training – a 'jihadi university' – for the 100,000 detainees forced to live there between 2004 and 2009. Doubly imprisoned by the takfiri, moderate Iraqis were subjected to a reign of terror and rigorous courses of Islamist study, with no possible means of escape. 'Extremists had freedom to educate the young detainees,' said a former prisoner. 'I saw them giving courses using classroom boards on how to use explosives, weapons and how to become suicide bombers.'" (pp.3-4)

a reactionary Islamist force, which at the height of its power in mid-2014 “held about a third of Syria and 40 percent of Iraq.”⁹⁴

And while ISIS’s one-time caliphate has been largely extinguished, it remains true that “the US, UK and allied governments have learned nothing from their disastrous actions in the Middle East and North Africa over the past 20 years which opened the door to ISIS. In the first place”⁹⁵ Indeed as Professor Tahir Abbas argues...

...while there is a presumption that it is the religious narrative that encourages vulnerable young people to turn to violent Islamist radicalisation to generate solutions to their worldly struggles, analysis of social media from the militant group the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) suggests that less than 10 per cent of its recruitment output refers to religion alone. Rather, the likes of ISIS focus on grievances, which are rooted in the experience of Muslims in Western European and North American societies. Recruiters play on the injustices of racism, exclusion, vilification in the media, political marginalisation, and cultural isolation.⁹⁶

Now the major Islamist threat to the world resides in Somalia, where America’s long running and undeclared war (which is backed by the UK government) has only emboldened their enemies. And in this instance, as one analyst put it very politely, “the U.S. might be doing more than merely exacerbating Somalia’s insecurity, and might be an active impediment to stability and conflict resolution in Somalia.”⁹⁷

⁹⁴ “Timeline: the rise, spread, and fall of the Islamic State,” *Wilson Center*, October 28, 2019.

⁹⁵ Patrick Cockburn, “The West failed to learn the most important lessons from the rise and fall of ISIS,” *CounterPunch*, January 29, 2019.

⁹⁶ Tahir Abbas, “Islamophobia in the United Kingdom: the vicious cycle of institutionalised racism and reinforcing the Muslim ‘Other’,” in: Naved Bakali and Farid Hafez (eds.), *The Rise of Global Islamophobia in the War on Terror: Coloniality, Race, and Islam* (2022), p.124.

⁹⁷ Εηνιόλά Ανιούλιώπαρο Σόυεμί, “Making crisis inevitable: the effects of U.S. counterterrorism training and spending in Somalia,” *Cost of War Project* (Brown University), April 27, 2023.

This escalating nightmare is however one that is currently spreading far beyond Somalia, and commenting on these worrying developments, Nick Turse -- the author of *Tomorrow's Battlefield: U.S. Proxy Wars and Secret Ops in Africa* (2015) -- is damning. As Turse reported in late 2023:

The raw numbers alone speak to the depths of the disaster. As the United States was beginning its Forever Wars in 2002 and 2003, the State Department counted a total of just nine terrorist attacks in Africa. This year, militant Islamist groups on that continent have, according to the Pentagon, already conducted 6,756 attacks. In other words, since the United States ramped up its counterterrorism operations in Africa, terrorism has spiked 75,000%.⁹⁸

A World Beyond Terror

The nightmare of capitalism must be ended, of that there can be no doubt. And the only meaningful remedy to this system of perpetual violence can arise when we, as the global working class, take political power into our own hands. This general point about where real power in society lies was made by Gareth Peirce. She reminds us that:

It is all too obvious that the reality of guarantees of human rights does not come from the top down, but has to be fought for, generation by generation, that they be observed, preserved, or, as is demanded now in this century, reinstated.⁹⁹

Indeed, when it comes to the defence of basic human rights, Marxists agree with Peirce, but we also believe that it is necessary to simultaneously work towards building the types of mass movements for change that can achieve the socialist transformation of political relations worldwide. However, in undertaking this mammoth task, we understand that the existing capitalist predators who are misruling the

⁹⁸ Nick Turse, "The Pentagon proclaims failure in its War on Terror in Africa," *TomDispatch*, November 13, 2023.

⁹⁹ Gareth Peirce, "Fabricating Terrorism II: British Complicity in Renditions and Torture," *CAGE*, 2009, p.4.

world will not give up their control of society without a fight. And as much as we wish to rid the world of violence and terror, socialists are clear that ordinary people must be able to defend themselves in our collective and democratic fight for a fairer world. This is why Marxists oppose both terrorism and pacifism.¹⁰⁰

It would be nice if violent means of defending ourselves could be simply done away with, but history has shown that capitalists are quite effective at crushing workers movements through force; and flowers and nice words are never enough to see off an enemy whose entire economic and political system rests upon a bedrock of violence. That said, socialists continue to remain determined fighters for meaningful reforms within capitalism; but we always make it clear that such reforms will always be taken away from workers as long as the ruling-class directs society. That is why alongside fighting for reforms we argue for the need for democratic workers' control of society's political apparatus. Then when our global movements are strong enough, our class will need to seize power for itself, to rid ourselves of capitalism's toxic priorities for ever more.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Barker, "*The Force of Nonviolence: a Marxist take on Judith Butler's ethico-political bind,*" *CounterPunch*, March 17, 2023.

TWO

Restricting Education

Capitalist elites, whether in the Labour or Conservative Party, have always used the tactics of divide-and-rule to try to crush the democratic aspirations of ordinary people. This should remind us to be vigilant of the scapegoating of all minorities, whether they be Muslims or members of the LGBTQ+ community. Likewise ruling-class politicians regularly malign the popular ideas of their socialist critics, with a prime example revolving around their demonisation of Jeremy Corbyn. This trend toward disparaging their political enemies is most apparent when it comes to mainstream reporting on working class success stories, like the mass resistance of the Poll Tax campaign or the inspiring fightback that took place during the 1980s in Liverpool. In both instances, Marxists, organised as members of the Militant Tendency, led successful mass struggles for justice in the face of the active opposition from not just the Conservative's but also from the Labour Party's national leadership.

To this day the significant gains obtained by members of the Militant, who had organised within the Labour Party in Liverpool, remains a thorn in the side of capitalist politicians. And in August 2016, with the threat of a potential Corbyn-led Labour government close to their mind, the *Daily Mail* rehashed a typical hatchet-job on the Militant Tendency's legacy in Liverpool, precisely because of its achievements. In this instance the hate-rag did however manage to provide an accurate summation of the events that unfolded in

Liverpool -- in one sentence, anyway -- when they stated: “In a rebellion against the Thatcher government in 1985, the council set an illegal ‘deficit budget’ committing the council to overspending by £30million - saying the excess was money ‘stolen’ by government cuts.” But the day preceding the publication of this commentary the *Guardian* printed a related article that shed further light on what happened - although within an article intending to disparage the Corbyn phenomena.¹ The newspaper article surmised:

The [Militant] faction’s biggest electoral success was in Liverpool, where the local party and city council were run by members of Militant who went on to set an illegal deficit budget in 1985, in defiance of party policy. The slogan of the local council was ‘Better to break the law than break the poor.’

It was because Liverpool’s socialist-led council adopted this approach to organising that their history has been so thoroughly demonised. As instead of simply passing on Tory cuts to the people of Liverpool, the city’s Labour council “launched a programme of action that included building houses, creating jobs, expanding services and freezing rents.” This was backed up by a mass campaign of resistance, involving huge anti-austerity protests involving tens of thousands of people, which were supported by “public and private sector trade unions, community organisations, youth organisations, party constituencies and party branches”.² However, because the city’s socialists were ultimately

¹ Jack Doyle, “Militant Tendency chief set to rejoin Corbyn’s Labour,” *Daily Mail*, August 11, 2016; Heather Stewart and Jessica Elgot, “Leader of expelled leftwing group Militant expects readmission to Labour,” *Guardian*, August 10, 2016.

² Militant member Tony Mulhearn explains how: “In the two years before the 49 Labour councillors (reduced to 47 by the death of Bill Lafferty and Peter Lloyd) were elected in May 1983, not a single house for rent had been built by the Liberal/Tory alliance which controlled the council. Council rents were the highest in the UK outside London. 5,000 council jobs had vanished. Youth unemployment in some areas of the city was in excess of 50%. The defeated Liberal/Tory alliance had left behind a financial gap of £10 million of unallocated cuts, and £30 million had been slashed from Liverpool’s budget by Tory minister Michael Heseltine. This was the nightmare inherited

thwarted in their efforts to spread this method of organising to other Labour-run authorities, in the following decades the influence of capitalist priorities over the Labour Party continued to grow. This was most plainly evident under the mis-leadership of the likes of Neil Kinnock, Tony Blair, and now Sir Keir Starmer. And while over the past few decades the working-class still managed to achieve some significant victories at the local level, overall, our class has since faced significant setbacks and attacks from governments of all political hues: a punishing process that has left our communities extremely vulnerable to the politics of scapegoating.

This vulnerability was particularly apparent in the wake of 9/11, when Britain's entire Muslim community was blamed for the terrorist action. But while it was the hateful and imperialist politics of Tony Blair's Labour government that oversaw the subsequent launching of the bloody and illegal War on Terror; the use of the same sort of warmongering policies was only intensified by their political successors. This was most sharply felt with the Islamophobia of Michael Gove, who in 2010 was anointed as the Secretary of State for Education in the Conservative's coalition government, and whose personal commitment to the persecution of Muslims culminated in

by the newly elected council in which Militant supporters played a prominent role." Thus, in addition to embarrassing the growing ranks of the careerist, distinctly unprincipled elected representatives of the Labour Party – which included the likes of Tony Blair – Liverpool councillors managed to:

- lead an immensely popular and well-backed battle in 1984 which forced Thatcher's government into a retreat worth up to £60 million. On the council's budget day in March 1984 (when a one-day strike took place) 30,000 local authority workers joined a 50,000 strong march in support of the council's deficit budget.
- create 6,400 jobs in the private sector because of the house-building programme, on top of thousands of local authority jobs created and saved. Other results included six new nurseries, and five colleges.
- and build over 5,000 council houses.

Tony Mulhearn, "Better to break the law than break the poor," *The Socialist*, October 17, 2012; also see, Mulhearn, *The Making of a Liverpool Militant: The Life and Times of a Political Activist* (2019).

2014 with the so-called “Trojan Horse affair.” As the front-page of *The Times* propagandised at the time:

Michael Gove believes that there has been a plot by extremist Muslims to take over schools in Birmingham and is preparing to drive them out, *The Times* can reveal. The education secretary is convinced that a small group of extremists has infiltrated schools in the city with tactics similar to those used by the Militant Tendency in the Labour Party in the 1980s, a senior source has said [the senior source briefing the press turned out to be Gove himself]. Mr Gove blames their influence on a reluctance within Whitehall, especially in the Home Office, to confront extremism unless it develops into terrorism and believes that a robust response is needed to ‘drain the swamp’.³

It is upon this issue, which saw politicians actively demonise Muslims who were trying to reform Birmingham’s education system, that this article will now focus to expose how the politics of divide-and-rule continue to operate within our communities with ruthless effect.

Before the Trojan Horse Affair

Of course, much has already been written to debunk the many myths surrounding Birmingham’s Trojan Horse affair: yet the affair is still regularly weaponised by the government to malign Muslims as demonstrated by the faulty summary of the affair that was presented in their recent Shawcross Review (2023). In this official ‘independent’ analysis of the government’s anti-radicalisation strategy, the review began by highlighting the “intensification of the threat” posed by Islamist groups since 2011. This point was ostensibly sustained by describing the 2014 Trojan Horse affair as an instance whereby “a group of individuals had sought to gain undue Islamist influence over several schools in Birmingham”. To support this point, in the review’s accompanying footnote, the Shawcross Review quoted an earlier government investigation, the Clarke Report - which, unfortunately,

³ Greg Hurst and Francis Elliott, “Cabinet at war over Islamic extremist plot to take over Birmingham schools,” *The Times*, June 4, 2014.

had been largely informed by unverified hearsay: a government Report that had arrived at the unsubstantiated conclusion that, in Birmingham, there was “very clear evidence that young people are being encouraged to accept unquestioningly attitude to a particular hardline strand of Sunni Islam [that] raises real concerns about their vulnerability to radicalisation in the future.” But we should be clear that the government’s interpretation of the Trojan Horse affair as reflected in their Clarke Report, or in the Shawcross Review, both fail to provide an accurate reflection of reality.⁴ Quite the opposite.

Professor Tahir Abbas in his 2017 article “The ‘Trojan Horse’ plot and the fear of Muslim power in British state schools” concluded that what the Trojan Horse affair actually uncovered were “deeply entrenched anti-Muslim sentiments in British politics combined with ongoing patterns of racialisation and victimisation of British Muslim groups.” He continued:

The government not only fell into the spell of anti-Muslim policy dogma but it also fuelled further mistrust between communities. There was some mismanagement afflicting certain schools, but the investigations failed to establish that there was any ‘plot’ to ‘Islamise’ schools or their mainly Muslim pupils. In an atmosphere of acute Islamophobia and political interference, the uncomfortable reality is that the victims of this episode were young Muslims who continue to face considerable barriers to success and social mobility because of limitations in the education system, and wider anxieties of structural and cultural racism. (p.427)

Now before going on to examine many of the questionable accusations

⁴ See for example, “The Muslim Council of Britain responds to Peter Clarke’s ‘Trojan Horse’ letter report” (July 23, 2014). While in 2023, “More than 200 civil society organisations, community leaders and academics have called on the UK government to withdraw” their controversial Shawcross Review, see Diane Taylor, “Withdraw review of PREVENT anti-radicalisation strategy, ministers urged,” *Guardian*, March 21, 2023.

that were levelled against Muslims during the misreporting on the Trojan Horse affair, which revolved closely around the actions of an educational professional named Tahir Alam, it is important to reflect upon some relevant background details. Professor Abbas's article is useful in this regard.

In the 1990s, the move to the New Right in education, supported under the New Labour government, furthered the process of marketisation in education. It provided parents and children with greater choice and therefore (supposed) greater opportunity. As a campaigner and activist in education, [Tahir] Alam became the Education Spokesman for the Muslim Council of Britain in 2003—a national Muslim umbrella organisation with considerable influence at the time. His aims were to ensure that British Muslim children were able to take advantage of this new regime, ensuring they too could benefit from the liberalisation of education. The role of school governors in steering the management and leadership of schools meant that parents and community members could play a greater part in the running of the schools. The process also ensured that too much power did not rest in the hands of head-teachers or local authority policy makers whose perspectives might have become outmoded in the light of new challenges facing schools. These changes met the needs and demands of a more competitive education system that allowed for greater independence at the school level. (p.430)

Now there is no questioning that Alam maintained a conservative outlook in both his political and religious views, but there can also be no doubting that he succeeded in turning around student results at some of the country's worst performing schools. These schools being in the largely Muslim areas of Birmingham – in areas of the city suffering under extremely high rates of economic deprivation.⁵ Thus Alam's first formal connection to an educational premises came about

⁵ Tahir Alam traced his interest in educational reform back to 1993 when he had watched a shocking (and racist) BBC Panorama documentary titled "Underclass in Purdah". This documentary had, in part, focused on the low educational attainment of Muslims at the school he attended as a child, Park View -- a school located in Alum Rock.

in January 1997 when he was appointed to the board of governors of Park View school. Professor John Holmwood and Professor Therese O'Toole point out in their book, *Countering Extremism in British Schools? The Truth about the Birmingham Trojan Horse Affair* (2018) how:

Park View had been a failing school as recently as 1996, but, over a short period of time, it had been transformed. Indeed, in 2006 it was deemed one of the most improving schools in England. By 2012, when it moved out of Local Education Authority (LEA) control to become an academy, it had examination results that placed it in the top 14% of schools in England. (p.3)

...It is worth emphasising the context of this success. According to data presented in the [2014] Clarke Report, Park View Academy had a pupil intake that was 98.8% Muslim, with 72.7% on free school meals (an indicator of social deprivation) and just 7.5% of pupils with English as a first language... In addition, the school had a higher-than-average number of pupils with special needs. Moreover, its 'feeder' primary school, Nansen - a school directly across the road from Park View - was a failing school... (p.4)

Therefore, as Professors Holmwood and O'Toole observed:

Unsurprisingly, [Park View's] success had earlier been taken up by politicians and by the Chief Inspector of Ofsted, Sir Michael Wilshaw, who affirmed that all schools should be like it. Its head teacher, Lindsey Clarke, was awarded an OBE for services to education in January 2014, and its chair of governors, Tahir Alam, was equally celebrated. Park View Academy was designated as a 'National Support School'. How it had achieved its success was of particular interest to other schools with a high proportion of Muslim pupils, an interest that would later be seen as an indication of suspicious links and a wish to 'Islamicise' them. More significantly, its 'takeover' of other (underperforming) schools - Golden Hillock and Nansen - was at the behest of the Department of Education (DfE) together with the Birmingham Education

Services department as part of its school improvement programme. (p.5)

This was all prior to the unfolding of the Trojan Horse affair, as was the 2006 publication of Michael Gove's own misinformed Islamophobic rant, *Celsius 7/7: How the West's Policy of Appeasement Has Provoked Yet More Fundamentalist Terror - and What Has to Be Done Now*.⁶ But even before the Conservative coalition government had become directly involved in mismanaging Birmingham's schools, the preceding Labour government had lost the trust of many Muslims in the city. A problem which had been aggravated by the introduction of Labour's PREVENT counter-extremism programme, with an early critique of this highly problematic programme being published in 2009 by Professor Arun Kundnani as "Spooked! How not to prevent violent extremism." Amongst other significant concerns, Professor Kundnani found "strong evidence that a significant part of the PREVENT programme involves the embedding of counter-terrorism police officers within the delivery of local services, the purpose of which seems to be to gather intelligence on Muslim communities".

Cities with large Muslim communities, like Birmingham, thus

⁶ In a book review published in the *Sunday Times* - a newspaper which had formerly employed Gove as on its editorial staff - its reviewer eviscerated Gove's text as "a confused epic of simplistic incomprehension, riddled with more factual errors and misconceptions than any other text I have come across in two decades of reviewing books on this subject." William Dalrymple, "A global crisis of understanding," *Sunday Times*, September 24, 2006. The reviewer adds: "Gove also rewrites history when he alleges it was the 'appeasement' of the Palestinians represented by the Oslo peace process that encouraged al-Qaeda to launch the 9/11 attacks. In fact it was the violent repression that followed Israel's unilateral ending of peace talks that formed the backdrop to the attacks. Bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has written that the repressive campaign waged against the second intifada by Sharon in autumn 2000 provided al-Qaeda's opportunity: as the corpses of dead children piled up, al-Zawahiri realised that here was the rallying cry that could unify the Muslim world. All that was needed was a huge strike and the US system in the Middle East would begin to unravel. And so it has indeed proved, to the peril of us all."

became an open target for PREVENT, and while Birmingham City Council “initially implemented PREVENT with cooperation from some Muslim organisations,” this did not last.⁷ Indeed, as one study reported...

...perceptions that PREVENT was police-led arose quite early on, not least... because of the secondment of a counter-terrorism police officer into the [Birmingham City] council’s equalities division to lead PREVENT. By 2010, suspicion towards PREVENT had intensified as a consequence of ‘Project Champion’. While not itself a PREVENT initiative, Project Champion did much to undermine the implementation of PREVENT in the city. Project Champion was a police surveillance operation involving installation of 216 CCTV and ANPR [Automated Number Plate Recognition] (overt and covert) cameras in two areas of Muslim settlement [Sparkbrook and Washwood Heath], creating a ‘surveillance ring’ around these areas. Importantly, the counter-terrorism purpose of the cameras was concealed from local residents, and the cameras were badged as a ‘crime safety initiative’ with little, and deeply flawed, community consultation... The true purpose of Project Champion was revealed by civil society campaigners with damaging implications for PREVENT. By the time PREVENT was revised and re-launched in 2011, there were very high levels of suspicion towards PREVENT, with few projects underway, such that in the words of one of our interviewees, ‘PREVENT is dead in this city.’⁸

⁷ In 2004 Birmingham City Council passed from Labour control into the hands of a governing coalition of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats, with the Labour Party only returning to power with an overall majority in 2012.

⁸ Therese O’Toole *et al.*, “Governing through PREVENT? Regulation and contested practice in state-Muslim engagement,” *Sociology*, 50(1), 2016, p.171. While the surveillance program was opposed by most local Labour MPs (including Roger Godsiff), those on the extreme right of the Labour Party like Khalid Mahmood said in later years that the spy cameras should never have been removed. Nick McCarthy, “Bring back the Project Champion spy cameras in Birmingham, says city’s Muslim MP,” *Birmingham*

Then another controversial event occurred in September 2013 when the leadership of Birmingham Metropolitan College - a sprawling institution that had around 44,000 students -- issued new guidelines which banned the wearing of niqabs. This was rightly seen by Muslim students as “a complete infringement on the rights to religious freedom and cultural expression and is a clear violation of a woman's right to choose.” Thousands of students subsequently protested and signed a petition which accused their college head, Dame Christine Braddock, of Islamophobia. This organised act of resistance led to a quick victory when the college decided to withdraw their proposed rule change.⁹

It is also significant that in 2013, after the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats had been leading Birmingham City Council for nine years, that Ofsted's chief inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, attacked the leadership of the Council for its poor track record on supporting children's services. In October 2013 Wilshaw had even referred to Birmingham City Council as a “national disgrace”. This led the *Daily Telegraph* to report that Wilshaw had...

...said the city's children's social services department had been blighted by poor management and a 'culture of low expectations' in the past. As a result it has failed seven Ofsted inspections, has seen eight whistle-blowers come forward in four years and had been failing to protect children properly for a decade.¹⁰

Mail, February 23, 2013.

⁹ Press Association, “Birmingham college makes U-turn on face veil ban,” *Guardian*, September 13, 2013. On September 1, 2013 the College had appointed the former chair of KPMG in Birmingham, Steve Hollis, to their board of trustees, and on September 23 he was “named as the new chairman of Birmingham Metropolitan College.” The choice of Hollis to act as the chairman of the college is controversial (but remained in keeping with the college's conservative leadership) as just a few years earlier he was exposed as being a member of the secretive Midlands Industrial Council. (Another person connected to the Council was Bob Edmiston, a Pentecostal Christian who has established three schools called Grace Academies.)

¹⁰ John Bingham, “Birmingham is 'national disgrace' says Ofsted chief

Launching the Affair

The key part of the Trojan Horse affair that thrust the issue of undue Islamic influence onto the public agenda originated with a hoax letter that was anonymously sent to the leader of Birmingham City Council in late November 2013. The brief covering letter that was attached to the letter warned “You have 7 days to investigate this matter after which it will be sent to a national newspaper who I am sure will treat it seriously.” However, despite this threat the first national news article about this affair was only published in February 2014. Either way, the four pages of conspiratorial plotting in the letter identified Tahir Alam as representing the city’s main troublemaker. The hoax letter, which was framed as a secretive communication between two Muslim conspirators, therefore promised that “Tahir [Alam] and I will be happy to support your efforts” to spread the “tried and tested” successes of “Operation Trojan Horse” from Birmingham to Bradford.

The government, in their 2014 Clarke Report, surmised that the letter had described a five-stage process to remove headteachers to allow radical Salafi Muslims to gain control of schools. These stages were:

- “identify your schools;
- “select a group of Salafi parents;
- “put our own governor in;
- “identify key staff to disrupt the school from within; and
- “an anonymous letter and PR campaign.”¹¹

inspector,” *Daily Telegraph*, October 15, 2013.

¹¹ The hoax letter concluded by observing that: “All these things will work towards wearing the head down, removing his/her resolve and weakening their mind-set so they eventually just give up. Please keep this report confidential and take no copies of it but shred it after reading. Any questions you may have can be raised with Tahir [Alam] at the meeting. I would also like...” The letter abruptly ends like this, as only four pages of the so-called letter ever became public, with the introductory and concluding pages of the letter never published, or more accurately given the fictitious nature of the

The unknown author of the hoax boasted in their letter that by “operat[ing] under the radar” they had already achieved successful Islamist outcomes at four Birmingham schools. Regents Park Community Primary School was the first school mentioned, and the hoax author went on to explain that the head of Regents Park “Tina Ireland will soon be forced to resign” – something that had happened the month before the hoax letter had been posted to Birmingham City Council. (This news had been reported in *the Birmingham Mail* on October 4, 2013, as “Birmingham headteacher and deputy quit in SATs results probe.”)¹² But further official investigations revealed there had been no Islamic plot and a report on this case produced by the National College for Teaching & Leadership determined that the head had “Failed to adhere to examination guidelines surrounding the administration of SATs mathematics test papers; specifically, that she altered the answers for a significant number of children”.

In early 2014 when the government’s Trojan Horse investigations subsequently began, the government undertook snap Ofsted inspections at the four schools highlighted in the hoax letter, along with 17 other local schools. Outrage in the local community quickly followed and Father Oliver Cross, who was the vice-chair of Regents Park’s board of governors and served as a local vicar, responded by releasing the following statement.

National Government and, through it’s incompetence and inaction, Local Government have wilfully allowed legitimate inquiry into the running of state schools in Birmingham, to become a full-blown attack on some of the most impoverished areas of our nation. These are areas where Anjem Choudary has been chased off by other Muslims, in which the voices of faith speak tolerance and acceptance - accepting, by the way, people faith more warmly than the spiritual vacuum of secularism. Islamic parents, in attempting to bring their children to maturity in their faith, are not likely to entrust the teaching of their faith to teachers of varying faiths and none.

letter, having ever been written in the first place.

¹² “Tina Ireland: Professional Conduct Panel outcome,” National College for Teaching & Leadership, July 2014. Ireland was replaced by Alan Beale in May 2014 – a head who remains in post.

I serve as Vice-Chair of Governors at Regents Park School in Birmingham, a school named in the press as being among those 'infiltrated'. I categorically refute those allegations, and have demonstrated their emptiness to HM Inspectors for Schools. Once allegations have been made, the complainants expect and the schools have a responsibility, to see that those claims are answered and investigated to the point of reasonable doubt. To those processes I submit myself gladly and openly - I have nothing to hide, and nothing about which to be ashamed.

State Schools follow the policies and procedures that are modelled for them by the Local Authority: until recently, this included nothing on PREVENT, and included an RE strategy and syllabus which is now condemned as Islamicising. Only a few years ago, it was trumpeted as a means by which stronger communities might be built. This unbelievable over-reaction risks sending Muslims into the darkness, because they fear being branded 'Islamists' simply for being who they are.¹³

In addition to Regents, the hoax letter named three other schools, these being Saltley School (whose head at the time had just resigned),¹⁴

¹³ Oliver Cross, "Of #trojanhorse, and rumours of Trojan Horses," *The Vicar of Purgstall*, April 15, 2014.

¹⁴ In one paragraph the hoax letter discusses plans to remove a Sikh Headteacher at Saltley School named Balwant Bains, a head who had resigned in mid-November 2013. Earlier in the year Bains had acted to permanently exclude a Muslim student for threatening another student with a knife, but the board of governors then proceeded to overturn this decision and reinstated the student. This then led to a successful ballot being undertaken by the teaching union NASUWT wherein teachers refused to teach the reinstated student. Ofsted subsequently visited the school and then wrote to Bains on November 7, 2013. In this Ofsted report the inspector observed: "Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the dysfunctional relationship between the governors and the headteacher is damaging the school's capacity to improve." This letter led to Bains' subsequent resignation on November 19. Press Association, "Teachers back industrial action over alleged knife-wielding pupil," *Guardian*,

Park View School, and Adderley Primary. However, the primary focus of the letter remained on the schools connected to Tahir Alam, with a lot of emphasis on Adderley Primary school where Alam was accused of helping coordinate an ongoing revolt of four Teaching Assistants against the school's head, Rizvana Darr. The letter had asserted that Darr "is not a good Muslim..." and was being targeted for removal. The hoax went on to state that four Teaching Assistants had submitted fake resignation letters as part of their efforts to undermine Darr's leadership; an element of the so-called plot that featured as the central case in the *New York Times'* eight-part investigative podcast that was aired in February 2022.¹⁵

There remains much speculation about what took place at Adderley, but what we do know is that Rizvana Darr became the Head teacher in April 2009, and that at the time of her appointment Tahir Alam had been involved with the direct management of the school: Alam had served as the local authority's appointed governor between 2007 and 2009. What is also clear is that prior to Darr's appointment the school had gone through an extremely "turbulent period" with many local parents angry about the school's low poor performance. In 2008 "Adderley was placed 266th out of all 273 Birmingham primary schools" and "there had been nine heads in seven years."¹⁶ This was one of the reasons why Alam had been appointed to the school's board of governors in the first place, so he could help resolve these troubles by working on behalf of the City Council.

Here it is significant that in 2014 the fate of one of Darr's predecessors, Kevin McCabe,¹⁷ would be reported on in the press to

September 24, 2013.

¹⁵ The following discussion of the controversy at Adderley school draws from the transcript of episode 2 of the "Trojan Horse podcast." Here it is worth noting that the podcast supported the speculative contention -- previously popularised by Tahir Alam -- that the hoax letter itself was likely to have been written by Rizvana Darr as a last-ditch effort to save her job. The problem with this accusation is that no substantive evidence has ever been presented to justify reaching this conclusion.

¹⁶ Annon, "Birmingham parents want Ofsted at their children's school," *Birmingham Mail*, March 7, 2008; Diamond, p.19.

¹⁷ Kevin McCabe had become Adderley's head in September 2005, that is,

support the contention that something untoward was going on at Adderley. McCabe's story seems to have also been referred to in the government's 2014 Clarke Report – a report whose production was supervised by the former head of the Metropolitan Police's counterterrorism command (Peter Clarke). Clarke's investigations had proved particularly controversial because he had collated off-the-record statements from various teachers, thereby presenting 'evidence' that could not be challenged by those it was directed against. To take one related example, in his report Clarke claimed:

A former headteacher told me that the governing body asserted that assemblies should be 'much more Islamic'. He therefore recruited someone from a nearby Islamic organisation, who gave inclusive assemblies with an Islamic focus. His decision was overruled by the governing body and, instead, Tahir Alam appointed a staff member who has been described as 'singularly unqualified and incapable of doing the job'. The former headteacher and another Adderley Primary headteacher described similar experiences of four or five members of staff, whom they feel incite the community and are led by Tahir Alam. (p.43)

In response to this statement, it should be acknowledged that some

shortly after the school went into "special measures". In November 2006 McCabe was then suspended "over allegations of gross professional misconduct." A show of support from other staff quickly led to his reinstatement, but in 2007 McCabe would resign following a period of sick leave that lasted for six months. At the time the local press reported that the initial "suspension came about as a result of Mr McCabe's sacking of a teacher, as well as his appointment of a senior member of staff, neither of which had gone through the governing body." In commenting on this affair, the Birmingham general secretary of the National Union of Teachers noted that McCabe felt that "some of the governors were not as supportive as they could be and we certainly believe the matter was handled very badly by the school." The union official added: "The allegation that he had, in some way, been deceiving the governing body was dropped in terms of his suspension being lifted." Anon, "'Misconduct' head resigns," *Birmingham Mail*, January 14, 2008.

more conservative Muslims may well have been upset with Rizvana Darr's appointment. Darr herself argued this point in a witness statement wherein she noted that parents "tell me I am not a good Muslim, not a good enough role model for their children, due to not covering my head" and that "I should be married". But whatever tensions existed between the new head and the other staff and parents -- remembering of course that Darr had been recruited with the active support of Alam -- the Teaching Assistants who had come into conflict with Darr had clearly been treated with contempt by their employer. Their strained dealings, in many ways, being emblematic of the type of exploitative relationship that commonly exists between school senior leadership teams and their underpaid and overworked support workers.¹⁸

The relationship between Darr and one of the four Teaching Assistants, a practicing Christian named Hilary Owens, was discussed in the Trojan Horse podcast like this:

In a witness statement, Mrs. Darr describes Ms. Owens as rebellious and emotional, an employee who would take to, quote, 'throwing her arms in the air, crying, lying on the floor, or spreading herself across the table when she didn't get her way.'

Most people would agree that this is certainly a strange way for a head to describe one of their employees. Either way, Owens' troubles seemed to date back to late 2012, when her trade union representative had first asked the school to make special accommodations for her continuing employment because of her poor health. Darr's reaction however was to refuse this request, which culminated in Owens "taking a leave of absence."¹⁹ But Owens wasn't the only support worker

¹⁸ UNISON carried out a national survey of teaching and classroom assistants (TAs) in autumn 2013. The report found that "48% expressed concern about bullying from colleagues, with 26% being 'very concerned' or 'concerned'... Comments revealed that bullying from management was the most common source". "Teaching assistants' survey 2013 - summary of results," UNISON, 2014.

¹⁹ Although it is not clear which union represented the TA's, the GMB union released a press statement (on May 16, 2014) titled "Trojan Horse for

having problems, as three other (Muslim) Teaching Assistants at the same school “were all on paid leave due to work-related stress.” (The Muslims employees were Shahnaz Bibi, Rehena Khanom and Yasmin Akhtar.)²⁰

Then in December 2012, with all four Teaching Assistants off work with stress, Darr announced that she had received resignation letters from all four, which all four employers subsequently denied sending. As was then common practice when it came to resolving such controversies, Darr sought the advice of the City Council, and in March 2013 the council advised Darr that she should ignore the seemingly forged resignation letters. But Darr ignored this advice and sacked the four Teaching Assistants (TAs). This led the narrator of the Trojan Horse podcast to comment:

Mrs. Darr saw the four TAs as a threat to her job. That's clear from the court files and her witness statements. She said they were miserable during the workday, constantly fighting her.

academies in Birmingham”. The statement said “Rather than supporting the staff employed in these schools the government is fixated on transforming the whole of the school network into academies purely because it suits their aims.”...“GMB calls for schools in Birmingham to be moved back under local government control where more stringent management and support can be supplied, from professionals that actually understand Birmingham and its demographics, not bureaucrats based in London with no concept of who they are dealing with.”

²⁰ Two of these three Muslim Teaching Assistants were sisters, while it is also important to note that at the time of the investigations another of their sisters (Furzana Bibi) served on Adderley’s board of governors. Another key governor at this time was Kadeer Arif, who served as the board of governors’ chair at the time Darr was appointed head, however “he left the school in 2012 after marrying Mrs Darr”. Subsequently, during the employment tribunal of the four sacked Teaching Assistants Kadeer Arif gave evidence stating: “The appointment of Mrs Darr was quite controversial; Mrs Darr is a Sunni Muslim and chooses not to cover her hair with a hijab. This, coupled with the fact that she is a female in authority, was not received well by some of the stricter Muslim community.” Emma McKinney, “Salafi Muslim parents claimed Christmas nativities 'brainwashed' their children, tribunal heard,” *Birmingham Mail*, December 9, 2015.

Rizvana Darr also started getting a lot of grief from parents about how she was running the school, in particular, more Orthodox parents, people Mrs. Darr referred to in the litigation as Salafi Muslims.

The Teaching Assistants (TAs) however, were adamant that “Mrs. Darr was the real bully.” As the podcast explained, in the period running up to their dismissal:

They, along with a few other colleagues, lodged formal grievances against her through their union for bullying, intimidation, and harassment... And notably, it was shortly after the TAs had filed these grievances that Mrs. Darr informed them that they had resigned -- that she had received resignation letters from them. According to the TAs, it was these official grievances -- that's why Mrs. Darr was so desperate to get rid of them.

...Their [union] rep was firing off emails to Birmingham City Council, which is Rizvana Darr's employer, saying that Mrs. Darr had quote, ‘fabricated the charade, and that in all her years, the representative had never seen someone more drunk on power than Rizvana Darr’.

The four Teaching Assistants subsequently brought an official employment tribunal against Adderley Primary school for unfair dismissal, and significantly, because Darr had chosen to ignore the City Council’s prior advice, the council refused to defend her.

Darr was now in trouble and as part of her defence she asserted that there had been a secretive Islamic plot to oust her. As a result of these very serious allegations, in April 2014 the police arrested all four Teaching Assistants; although after talking to them and searching their home computers, the Teaching Assistants were released with the police finding no evidence of fraud. But their employment tribunal however dragged on for years, and it was only in January 2016 that the national press reported that the tribunal had upheld Owens claim for unfair dismissal “while rejecting related cases by her three Muslim colleagues.”²¹

²¹ Richard Adams, “Trojan Horse tribunal rejects Muslim teaching assistants’

It seems that the tribunal had not been convinced by the evasive answer given by Rehana Khanom (one of Muslim Teaching Assistants) when she had been “asked to explain the difference between a Salafi and a Sunni Muslim, and she said she didn’t know”. This wasn’t a particularly convincing answer, especially when it was then revealed that Khanom’s husband was employed as the head of the Salafi Independent School in Birmingham. However, this evasiveness on Rehana’s part likely owed to the way that all Salafi’s (who, it is important to highlight, are also Sunni Muslims) have been wrongly maligned in the British press as representing a religious tendency synonymous with terrorism. So as the podcast narrator observes, the Muslim Teaching Assistants had “Probably figured, if they acknowledged any link to Salafi Islam, they were going to lose.”²²

Tahir Alam and the Central Case of Park View School

To recap, the key dates relating to the official responses to the Trojan Horse letter were as follows: on November 27, 2013, Birmingham City Council received the hoax letter; this was then passed on to the Department for Education on December 13 “from West Midlands Police via the Home Office.” At the end of January, the Department for Education then reported that they “were contacted by a national campaigning organisation [the British Humanist Association] that put them in touch with whistleblowers who had information about Park View School,” and the first press story about the case was printed in the *Sunday Times* on February 23, 2014. This article was titled “Top academy investigated for ‘sidelining’ non-Muslim staff” and reported how:

unfair dismissal claims,” *Guardian*, January 15, 2016.

²² In discussing this “pivotal moment” the podcast narrator notes that Daniel Zakis, the solicitor who represented Hilary Owens, said that except for the three Muslim Teaching Assistants evasiveness around the questioning about their connections to the local Salafi community “destroyed their credibility” (as he put it) even though “he found everything else the TAs said throughout the case -- about what happened, about not resigning -- consistent and credible.” This issue is discussed in episode 7 of the “Trojan Horse podcast.”

A former employee of Park View Academy in the inner-city Alum Rock area of Birmingham is understood to have claimed that non-Muslim staff were being treated unfairly.

The employee also alleged that the academy, which has been approved to oversee two other schools in Birmingham, has been attempting to teach Islamic studies despite not being a faith-based state school.

Last year Ofsted, the schools inspectorate, received a complaint from a member of staff at Park View that the school in effect excluded female students from after-school tennis classes by ruling that they could not be taught tennis by male teachers.

It would later turn out that the whistleblower who'd contacted the British Humanist Association, was the same former Park View employee who had sent the anonymous complaint to Ofsted. This individual was a school manager (an "educational vice co-ordinator") named Susan Packer who had resigned from her job at Park View in October 2013. In an interview (aired by the Trojan Horse podcast) Susan recalled that she had reported an incident of what she perceived to be religiously inspired sexual discrimination to Park View's senior leadership team but had felt she had been ignored. A report which had been made in relation to the tennis class incident. After making another complaint Susan stated that the principal had accused her "of bringing the school into disrepute". Susan then recalled getting "a letter from the HR manager to say that the investigation was going to start" and that consequently she had become "stricken with anxiety," "So I just wrote my notice and left," Susan stated.

At the time Susan Packer's husband Steve was still employed at Park View, having first joined the school's staff in the 1980s. But Susan was determined to alert the external authorities to her concerns. As related in podcast:

...Sue started contacting the authorities, imploring them to look into the creeping Islamisation inside Park View. She wrote to Ofsted, the school inspectors. She wrote to Birmingham City Council. She wrote these places anonymously because she was scared Steve might lose his job

if their colleagues at Park View found out what she was doing. But as far as she and Steve could tell, the agencies didn't do anything. She made several calls to Ofsted. Steve also wrote them anonymously.²³

During the podcast, the interviewers showed Susan a copy of an anonymous letter concerning Park View that she'd sent to Ofsted and Birmingham City Council in the summer of 2013. The interviewer stated:

So, in this letter to Ofsted, Sue, you say that children said in a class that homosexuals should be thrown off a cliff or burnt alive, and that the teacher who was head of that year agreed and said, that's what we believe. You said the entire staff was told not to compliment girls in the school in this letter to Ofsted. You said that young girls from Park View are being taken away to get married and that staff are not stopping it in this letter to Ofsted. And then you say that there's a Sharia council promoting Sharia law in Alum Rock.

Susan answered in the affirmative to these points. This led the interviewer to ask why she had never again mentioned these serious allegations when “on the stand or in giving evidence” to other interested investigatory bodies. Susan’s answer to this question was that she “wasn't witness” to those purported incidents and thereby understood that these allegations were only based on “hearsay.”

In the same anonymous letter, Susan had gone on to highlight an incident where an acting vice principal at Park View had been overlooked for a promotion because he wasn't a Muslim; although she

²³ Following the lead of Susan Packer, who contacted the British Humanists with her concerns in January 2014, her son, Tom Packer, who was a former teacher at Park View “also wrote the Humanists, saying he wanted to resurface his complaint about the sex ed lesson from three years before.” After the Packer’s concerns were passed on to the Department for Education at the end of January, Susan spoke to the DfE “deputy head of its Counter Extremism Division” on the phone, and “The next day, Michael Gove's people in London wrote Sir Albert Bore's people in Birmingham to arrange that critical meeting on February 12th.” Episode 5, “Trojan Horse podcast.”

forgot to point out that the individual was her husband, Steve Packer. But there may well have been good reasons why Steve was overlooked for a promotion, as in 2018 he self-published a book titled *Moonrise at Daybreak* which he admitted was “written as an *Animal Farm* type story” and is “my telling of the story of what happened to us at school.”²⁴ As one critical reviewer put it: Steve’s text “is very much steeped in a narrative of liberal Islamophobia”. The reviewer concluded that “There is a great deal wrong with the book and the way that it presents the Trojan Horse hoax, but in reality this novel does the work of revealing Packer’s bigoted views.”²⁵

None of this is to deny that some of the Muslim teachers at Park View held conservative religious beliefs – as was revealed by the closed WhatsApp group messages that were shared by some of the men associated with the school – but the holding of such beliefs does not explain why the Trojan Horse scandal unleashed such an avalanche of hate upon Muslims.²⁶ This was certainly the view of David Hughes,

²⁴ When asked “So is this fiction? Is it non-fiction? How would you describe it?” Steve replied “It’s a difficult one. It’s fiction, but it tells the story.”

²⁵ Asim Qureshi, “Islamophobia at Daybreak: a critical reading of Stephen Packer’s fictional account of the Trojan Horse affair,” *Discover Society*, June 27, 2022.

²⁶ “The Clarke Report stated that ‘the majority of the postings [in the private WhatsApp group] are innocuous and often mundane.’” That was the summary provided by Professors John Holmwood and Therese O’Toole in their book, *Countering Extremism in British Schools?* which provides a useful discussion of these messages. And while the Clarke Report suggested that some of the messages fall under the definition of extremism as provided by PREVENT Holmwood and O’Toole believed that “...the examples from the transcripts that are provided do not meet this definition. For example, there is a discussion of the advantages of gender segregation that refers to the practices of the best private schools, but the teachers involved are divided on the issue, although in principle, they are sympathetic. Another example is a discussion of pro-European bias in accounts of world history, where the value of pupils knowing about the 14th century North African Arab scholar Ibn Khaldoun is put forward. Ibn Khaldoun is widely regarded as one of the most important philosophers of history and politics in the Middle Ages. There is also a brief conversation between two teachers about soliciting support from the pupils for a petition that sought the proscription of the English Defence League, a single post vehemently condemning gay marriage, and posts

who penned an open letter in the Spring 2014 edition of Park View's parent newsletter where he observed:

As a Park View Trustee and Governor at Park View School for over 15 years who is a white, practising Anglican Christian, I am writing this open letter to all those people who appear to have joined in the witch hunt against the most successful school of its characteristics in Birmingham (72% of our pupils are eligible for Free School Meals) under the pretext of concerns about extremism and threats to the education of pupils. Contrary to what Khalid Mahmood MP would have people believe we governors are not Salifists or Wahabis, not even Muslim in my case.

Hughes said "Fifteen years ago when I first became a Governor the school was a much different place. Less than 20 per cent of pupils were gaining 5A*-Cs." And while at present he stated that "Seventy two per cent (72%) of our pupils are eligible for Free School Meals," their academic results are now a world apart from the late 1990s such that "In 2013 75% of pupils gained 5 A*-C grades at GCSE including English and Maths."²⁷ He went on:

Unfortunately some of those former staff members who are now sharing fictitious accounts with the media are the very same staff whose performance and expectations of pupils proved that they weren't along for the journey. If they had shown the same enthusiasm for making sure their pupils got a good education as they have for smearing the school in the media, Park View would have been a much different place. They're trading on their supposed 'insider' status and hoping that no-one can remember that far back to actually challenge their accounts.

expressing abhorrence at a report of the use of a shrine in Pakistan as a meeting place for gay men." (For more details about the WhatsApp messages see *Countering Extremism in British Schools?*)

²⁷ David Hughes, "Open letter from David Hughes Park View School Governor," *Park View Parent Newsletter*, Spring Term 2014.

Well, I chaired the Disciplinary Panel that recommended the dismissal of Michael White for his unprofessional behaviour as a senior teacher. At no time either during that panel, or subsequently, has he made allegations of a 'Muslim plot', until now.

Equally Mr [Nigel] Sloan, who claimed in a Sunday newspaper this weekend that he saw 'anti-American assemblies' in the late 1990s that were 'mind-blowing', made no complaints at the time and has not done so since, until now.

Mr Sloan was suspended from Park View while complaints from parents that he had referred to their children during lessons in the most derogatory terms could be investigated, not simply because (as he alleges) he made a comment about the wearing of a headscarf. He resigned before a full investigation could be conducted.

Similarly, as well as remaining anonymous, the staff complainants who allege that 'a senior colleague' had endorsed the views of Anwar-al-Awlaki when addressing pupils have not given any specific details of when and where this happened or named any witnesses to the allegation, which the school strongly denies.

Hughes reminded his readers:

When I started as a governor here over 15 years ago no recognition was given to the fact that over 90% of the children were Muslim. In fact it was resisted sometimes in the strongest terms: no Halal food served; there were no facilities or arrangements for student prayer, for those who wanted it; girls who wanted to wear headscarves were not allowed to and the school refused to apply for a religious part-determination to allow its collective act of worship to be Islamic in nature. All these things are now in place.

At the time this statement was published Park View's board of governors consisted of just three people: these being David Hughes, Tahir Alam (who was the chair), and a Muslim women named Nicola

Benyahia who, like the other governors, “stood down in July 2014 at the height of the uproar into allegations that hard-line Muslim groups had attempted to infiltrate schools in the city.” The latter’s involvement in the entire affair was particularly tragic, as at the very moment when the Trojan Horse crisis was being whipped up into a frenzy by the government and the press, her own son was becoming increasingly alienated from society. Thus, in early 2015, at age 19, her son chose to fight alongside ISIS in Syria where he died later in the year. As was reported at the time, Nicola Benyahia...

...singles out two elements in their family life at the time which she believes may have made him more vulnerable to extremists: a rocky patch in his parents’ marriage and her own experience in being caught up in the Trojan Horse affair. She said that despite concerns about what was happening she had hoped to stick it out as a governor because she wanted a progressive Muslim female voice to be heard on the board. But she fears the case might have been used by extremists to turn him against Britain.²⁸

Indeed, it has been said many times before, but the British government’s counter-terrorism policies had always posed the “danger of producing the opposite effect,” that is of driving “a deep new wedge between Muslims and the rest of us.” This point was made in James Fergusson’s 2017 book *Al-Britannia, My Country: A Journey Through Muslim Britain* with the author admitting that he wrote his book, in part, “to learn more about why so many young Muslims were abandoning their lives in the West for a warzone” to fight alongside the likes of ISIS.²⁹ So, when it came to understanding the fallout from the events in Birmingham, Fergusson was correct to conclude:

The implications of the Trojan Horse affair are broad. The Islamist takeover plot, although non-existent, provided the

²⁸ John Bingham, “Trojan Horse school governor’s son was killed fighting with Isil,” *Daily Telegraph*, November 22, 2016.

²⁹ James Fergusson, *Al-Britannia, My Country: A Journey Through Muslim Britain* (2017), p.4, p.2.

government with a springboard for the introduction of tough new regulations, such as PREVENT Duty or the proposed Extremism Disruption Orders. By turning the hunt for Islamist fifth columnist's official, it also subtly sanctioned society's deepening discrimination against Muslims in general. (p.134)

Furthermore, when it came to understanding what had been going on in Birmingham's schools before 2014, he explained:

I spent three days criss-crossing [Birmingham] city, interviewing parents, teachers and pupils from four of the schools affected by the Trojan Horse affair, and found a broad consensus that the government had overreached itself. There were naturally varied opinions of what the schools had been like, and many different versions of who believed what or who once said what to whom. Not all of my interviewees were fans of Tahir Alam, whose disciplinarian style was not as universally popular as he made out. The schools, for all their good academic results, were not perfect. In the end, though, they all said the same thing: that Alam and the other dozen alleged Islamist plotters were innocent of any charge of what they understood by 'extremism'. (p.120)

While another commentator, reflecting upon the Trojan Horse affair as it unfolded, wrote in July 2014:

How do we move on from this? Perhaps by accepting that there are in Britain socially and religiously conservative parents who are free to choose a way of life that is different from others. Indeed they have been encouraged to become active in their communities by the state. Given freedoms to design and organise new schools to help raise standards of attainment, in which some will nurture an ethos that is shared within their 'local' culture. In the process some may stray in important respects away from more broadly accepted (but as yet poorly defined) British values, norms and conventions. Indeed others may go further and define an ethos where cultural and religious/non-religious preferences predominate or are even used to inculcate others. They will do all this under the aegis of a free/academy school framework in most cases

(but not exclusively) allowing some palpably bad behaviour to creep in, including examples of bullying and intimidation by some governors. All of which is carried out under the watchful lens of weak local accountability by the [Local Education Authority]. That poor governance and leadership should result in unacceptable behaviour in this context is compounded by apparently little training on offer to newly recruited governors, and evidently weak management in schools. Surely that such a multiplicity of factors should give rise to evidence in some schools of very poor practice in citizenship education and social inclusion should not be surprising. If this is the set of circumstances that defines ‘extremism’ then our school system has problems far greater than even Ofsted can manage to expose.³⁰

Religious Teachings in Schools

As in most parts of British society, religious minorities continue to suffer from the consequences of state-backed racism when it comes to their education: a troubling situation that Tahir Alam had personally sought to help remedy when he had joined Park View’s board of governors in 1997. So, it is pertinent to remember, especially considering the accusations of undue religiosity bandied about during the Trojan Horse affair that:

Within England and Wales in 1997 about 20 percent of pupils were educated within religiously based state-maintained schools. Almost 7000 (out of about 30,000) state-maintained schools had an explicit religious affiliation; there being some 4800 Church of England, 2140 Roman Catholic, 55 Methodist (some in association with the Church of England) and 23 Jewish schools. What is very evident from this list is that it reflects the predominant religious affiliations of the population of 1944 rather than that of the far more religiously and ethnically diverse population of the 1990s. The pattern of religious schools available within the state-maintained sector

³⁰ Museji Ahmed Takolia, “British Muslims are asking: are we all extremists now?,” *Huffington Post*, July 3, 2014.

takes little account of the increased religious diversity within England that resulted from immigration since that time of families from such countries as India, Pakistan, Kenya and the Caribbean.³¹

Therefore, in part because of the Conservative Party's enduring racism,³² it took until 1998, when the (less racist) Labour Party had been elected to government, for the first two Muslim schools to be co-opted into the state-maintained sector as voluntary-aided schools, these being Islamia School in Brent, London, and Al-Furqan School in Birmingham. However, these developments, while proving positive for some Muslims, were by no means progressive, as the Labour Party's promotion of a greater variety of faith schools was but a reflection of the party's ongoing drift to the right of the political

³¹ Geoffrey Walford, "English education and immigration policies and Muslim Schools," in: Holger Daum *et al.* (eds.), *Educational Strategies among Muslims in the Context of Globalization: Some National Case Studies* (2004), p.209.

³² Helen Carr, "Conservative politicians opposed funding for Muslim schools in England," *The Conversation*, June 22, 2022. In 2014, the same year that the Trojan Horse affair made the headlines, the racist Tory leader, Suella Fernandes [now Braverman], was part of the steering group that set up the Michaela Community School under the leadership of the now infamous head teacher Katharine Birbalsingh. Notably, "Between 2019-2021, conservative commentator Calvin Robinson was also listed as a governor of the school, and held the position of Senior Fellow responsible for Education Policy at the Conservative-linked Policy Exchange think tank in 2020, but is no longer in role as of 2023" as he has now moved even further to the right of the political spectrum. Josiah Mortimer and Max Colbert, "Braverman and Birbalsingh: the close Tory ties of the right wing's beloved 'strictest headmistress'," *Byline Times*, July 11, 2023.

"It is our way or the highway' is the stark message at the Michaela Community School, where its principal, Katherine Birbalsingh, celebrates the dubious accolade of being 'the strictest school in Britain'. As David Buckingham writes with reference to its ultra-conservative curriculum: "This is not the curriculum of a modern country, confident and secure of its place in the world. It is the curriculum of Little Britain. It gazes not forwards and outwards, but backwards and inwards. Welcome to the curriculum of Brexit." Diamond, *The Birmingham Book*, p.336.

spectrum.³³ This point is made in Professor Geoffrey Walford's book *Policy and Politics in Education: Sponsored Grant-Maintained Schools and Religious Diversity* (2017).

The [New Labour] legislation that introduced sponsored grant-maintained schools did not suddenly appear, but was the result of a great deal of pressure from a diversity of campaigning groups. In recent years calls for greater diversity of schools funded by the state have come to be associated with the New Right, and many have seen the 1993 Education Act and its preceding White Paper *Choice and Diversity* (DFE, 1992) as epitomising New Right ideology.

Other factors that led to New Labour's embrace of such right-wing ideals included the advocacy efforts of Muslims who had become "increasingly vocal in their demands for state funding" for private schools. Although it must be emphasised that Muslim influence on the development of British educational legislation pales into insignificance compared to the lobbying influence of influential evangelical Christians.³⁴ However, New Labour's faith-based policy shift was significant because, historically speaking, socialists and trade unionists had maintained a proud legacy of campaigning for a secular education system. Campaigning which famously dated back to the

³³ An early example of such lobbying efforts was the Campaign for State Supported Alternative Schools (CSSAS), a group which had been founded in 1979 and whose key political figure was an elitist right-wing social democrat named Lord Michael Young of Dartington. However, this group's activities had terminated by the mid-1980s.

³⁴ The Christian Schools Trust was formally established in 1988 and the Christian Schools Campaigns (later Campaign) was formed in 1989 (although by 1992 most Christian activists had moved into the newly named Christians in Education). Initial patrons of the Campaign included Lord Young of Dartington, and arch right-winger Baroness Cox of Queensbury. "The range of Patrons willing to support the Campaign indicates that it is not possible to simply equate the Campaign with the New Right. However, it is true that the most active political Patrons have been the Right wing conservative members-Michael Alison in the House of Commons and Baroness Cox in the House of Lords." (Walford, *Policy and Politics in Education*)

Labour movements opposition to the implementation of the 1902 Education Act, an Act which had caused much controversy when it had “legislated for ‘voluntary’ schools to be left in the control of the Church but paid for by the public purse.”³⁵

In the present day much has changed, and now socialists, as part of broader campaigning efforts to reverse all forms of privatisation insist that religious schools that receive government funding must, as an immediate step, be brought under local democratic control in the state sector. In 2006, Martin Powell-Davies, a socialist active in the National Union of Teachers adds the proviso:

That doesn't mean that socialists and trade unionists shouldn't carefully explain why they support secular education, while also defending the right of every individual to practise their religion. This should include supporting the granting of special leave for religious festivals, not just Christian ones. It also means defending the right of Muslim girls to choose - or to choose not - to wear the hijab.

However, we must oppose religious views being used as an excuse to prevent young people from gaining access to a thorough health and sex education or to allow discriminatory, homophobic or scientifically false ideas such as ‘intelligent design’ to find their way into the curriculum.

We argue for policies that should apply universally - for inclusive, well-resourced, non-discriminatory, genuinely comprehensive schools teaching a range of religious and non-religious views as part of a wider humanities curriculum that encourages solidarity across the globe.³⁶

³⁵ Martin Powell-Davies, “Education after New Labour’s Education Bill,” *The Socialist*, June 8, 2006. For more on this history, see Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990* (1991), pp.51-4.

³⁶ Powell-Davies, “Education after New Labour’s Education Bill”. Powell-Davies highlights that public polling demonstrated that “most Muslims in Britain support multiracial, multi-faith schools, understanding that further separatism would only lead to increased discrimination against the Muslim community.” Later polling carried out in 2015 likewise showed that “most Muslim people in Britain would not choose a Muslim faith school for their

Despite such admirable goals, until socialist ideas become more popular, it will remain the case that members of persecuted minority communities will continue to seek more immediate solutions to the racist policies of our government.³⁷ After all, it was existence of such persistent discrimination that drove Tahir Alam to take an interest in the governance of Muslim-majority schools in the first place, and to his joining Birmingham's Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACRE). And here Alam's involvement with this latter group proved particularly important. This was because the mainstream reporting on the Trojan Horse affair deliberately ignored the fact that, if authorised by the local SACRE, secular schools (like Park View) could vary from the normally mandated Christian collective assembly to that of a faith that most appropriately reflected their student intake.³⁸

child." "Two thirds of British Muslims would not choose a Muslim faith school for their child," *ACCORD Coalition*, February 27, 2015.

³⁷ It is not all bad news, and in 1975 the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Instruction (BAS) was introduced to help the local education system adjust to the changing needs of a city which had a rapidly expanding immigrant community. "The BAS represents one of the first and most radical attempts in England - through a statutory Agreed Syllabus - to move RE from a curriculum dominated by Christianity and Bible stories to one which sought to introduce children from the earliest ages to other world religions and (as they were specifically called in the syllabus) non-religious 'stances for living' (i.e. Communism and Humanism)." Stephen Parker and Rob Freathy, "Ethnic diversity, Christian hegemony and the emergence of multi-faith religious education in the 1970s," *History of Education*, 41(3), 2012, p.13; an early history of how racist attitudes evolved in Birmingham is provided in Paul Foot's *Immigration and Race in British Politics* (1965) and in John Rex and Robert Moore's book *Race, Community and Conflict: A Study of Sparkbrook* (1967).

³⁸ The Conservative Party's 1988 Education Reform Act "was a precursor to the idea of academy schools, in so far as it allowed schools to opt out of LEA control". And as Professors Holmwood and O'Toole explain in *Countering Extremism in British Schools?* the Act "runs together religious education and collective worship, but it is clear that religious education provides the context within which collective worship should take place. A school assembly at the beginning of the day should include collective worship of a mainly (or wholly)

In Birmingham as elsewhere, the religious practices agreed by the local SACRE had applied to the running of all Local Authority maintained schools, although this issue became more complicated as successive governments encouraged schools to become independent academies.³⁹ This created numerous problems, especially in relation to how matters of faith were to be determined as now such independent schools “Would be outside the oversight of the local SACRE (although religious education and daily worship remained mandatory).” Local educationalists in Birmingham had evidently tried to resolve this ongoing problem, and as Professors Holmwood and O’Toole pointed out:

Birmingham SACRE made a strong representation to the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, arguing that the problem of the proposed arrangements was that they removed moderating influences on governors and teachers who could develop a curriculum without even the engagement of their local faith organisations, let alone the collective

Christian character albeit not specific to any particular denomination. The idea was that such an assembly would provide the moral and spiritual framing for the school day. However, the Act also recognised that the opportunity of individual withdrawal from participation on the grounds of religious conscience would be a problem if exercised widely by those from minority religious backgrounds. In consequence, it was allowed that there could be separate ‘determinations’ to vary the framework of collective worship to reflect the needs of the school and its particular intake of pupils. These determinations would be authorised by the local SACRE and reviewed on a five-yearly basis.”

³⁹ On the problems associated with academisation, “It could be argued that the net effect of these policies has been to break down the institutionalised interests of teachers, trade unions and local democratic control mechanisms: anything that supports a public sector as part of the state- civil society social contract. The cumulative effect of all these policies is to weaken and disconnect local schools from the locally elected authority. Paradoxically, such policies appear to have increased central government control through a system of standards, testing and measuring watched over by the inspection regime of OFSTED.” James Arthur, “Extremism and neo-liberal education policy: a contextual critique of the Trojan Horse affair in Birmingham schools,” *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 63(3), 2015, p.313.

experience of the various committees represented within the local SACRE. Michael Gove's response was typically robust and dismissive. He saw no merit in the argument, reaffirming his commitment to religious education, but stating, in effect, that it would be better to treat a locally agreed syllabus as like a product in the marketplace: it would be chosen if it met pupils' needs as determined by the governing body and head teacher of a school. (p.103)

Under Alam's leadership, Park View, which had been converted into an academy in 2012, therefore chose to continue to "follow the locally agreed curriculum for religious education" - the one that had been previously determined by Birmingham SACRE. But because of the incompetent and wholly inadequate way in which the Department for Education oversaw the academisation process, schools that had previously had definite agreements in place to offer Islamic collective worship now had no means of securing a legally-binding agreement with the DfE⁴⁰ This is all relevant because shortly after Park View had converted to an academy, their agreed determination with Birmingham SACRE lapsed, and understandably, especially considering that the school's intake was nearly entirely Muslim, their school's leadership "did not expect a school that had had a determination since 1997 to revert to Christian worship in 2013

⁴⁰ "It seems that the [Department for Education] put in place no mechanisms for doing so (at least, this is what can be inferred from the fact that a Freedom of Information request by Birmingham SACRE elicited the information that no determinations had been made by the DfE). Worryingly, the Kershaw Report misrepresents this request by the SACRE." Holmwood and O'Toole, *Countering Extremism in British Schools?* It is important to note that "the incorporation of Al-Furqan into PVET, which the Secretary of State had scheduled for November 2013, did not go ahead. The trustees of Al-Furqan did not believe that arrangements would sufficiently protect the Islamic ethos of their school and PVET could not endorse the practices of an Islamic faith school as their own." Thus the very Academy chain supposedly at the centre of the Islamist plot that was headed by Tahir Alam was asked by the Conservative government to take over a school that operated from a "conservative Islamic perspective" but had declined to take it over.

because of poor procedures at the DfE.” Holmwood and O’Toole add:

Nonetheless, the Department of Education’s adviser to the Clarke Report and member of the [Education Funding Agency] Review of [Park View Educational Trust], Ann Connor, testified that when the ‘determination’ lapsed in 2012, Park View Academy should have reverted to Christian worship. When asked about the possible impact on children at the school (98.9% of whom were Muslim), her response was that ‘there isn’t any reason why the, um, the nature of the worship shouldn’t have prepared the children, and there’s also a possibility for, um, the teaching of Islam in other, in other aspects of school life in religious education’. In other words, while Christian collective worship would be unproblematic (‘preparing children for life in modern Britain’), notwithstanding the background of the pupils, Islamic collective worship is suggested to be *problematic in itself*. It also rather misses the point that collective *worship* is supposed to afford pupils a moment of spiritual reflection on values, not information about Britain’s religious heritage. (p.218)

The Government Investigates

Following the publication of the first media article on the so-called “Trojan Horse affair” in February 2014, which was then amplified by an equally toxic follow-up article titled “Islamist plot to takeover schools” (*Sunday Times*, March 2), the government was apparently now ready to act (ie., ready to demonise Muslims). Ofsted inspectors working for the Department for Education were rapidly deployed to inspect 21 schools across East Birmingham – with inspections carried out in March and April.

The Ofsted reports then went unpublished for an agonising length of time while leaks to the press multiplied. Gove resisted calls from 10 Birmingham MPs to publish the Ofsted reports quickly and to work in partnership with Birmingham City Council to conduct one coordinated inquiry. The unnecessary number of separate yet overlapping investigations that ensued by the Education Funding Agency, the City

Council and the DfE, and the associated press leaks, has without doubt contributed to a sense of persecution within the Muslim community.⁴¹

When the Ofsted results were finally released in June, no evidence of extremism was found, but five of the schools received extremely poor inspection results and were placed in “special measures” (the lowest Ofsted grade). These schools then became defined as nodes of Islamic extremism at the centre of the Trojan Horse affair. They included the three academies that were run by the Park View Educational Trust comprising of two secondary schools, Park View and Golden Hillock, and one primary, Nansen; and two additional schools, Saltley, a local authority secondary school, and Oldknow Academy, a primary.

Writing just before the Ofsted reports were published, Sir Tim Brighouse, a former chief education officer in Birmingham (who had acted in this capacity from 1993 until 2003), coauthored an open letter with 19 others which was published in *The Guardian* on June 3. The open letter began, “several major Ofsted reports are due to be published about the so-called ‘Trojan Horse’ schools in Birmingham which are alleged to be at the centre of a plot to ‘Islamise’ schools.” The letter argued:

First-hand accounts of the Ofsted inspections that have emerged are disturbing. They suggest that inspectors were poorly prepared and had an agenda that calls into question

⁴¹ Sarah Barton and Richard Hatcher, “The consequences of the Trojan Horse affair and a possible way forward for Birmingham,” *Forum*, 56(3), 2014, p.458. A related report produced by other local education campaigners (which included Barton and Hatcher) explained “Gove’s actions attempted to establish a link between religious conservatism within Islam and terrorism. That was the rationale for instructing Ofsted to inspect 21 schools and the decision to commission Peter Clarke to carry out an inquiry. Gove will have been well aware that the media, and in particular the Tory press, would provide a continuous commentary reinforcing the ‘conservative Islam = extremism = terrorism’ narrative and the consequent demonisation of the whole Muslim community.” “The Trojan Horse affair and its consequences: a response from Birmingham CASE,” (Part 1), August 2014.

Ofsted's claim to be objective and professional in its appraisal of standards in schools serving predominantly Muslim pupils.

Numerous sensationalised leaks have reinforced the perception of a pre-set agenda. It is beyond belief that schools which were judged less than a year ago to be 'outstanding' are now widely reported as 'inadequate', despite having the same curriculum, the same students, the same leadership team and the same governing body... This has damaged not only the reputation of the schools but the integrity of the inspections process.

This is uncharted territory, with Ofsted seemingly being guided by an ideology at odds with the traditional British values which schools are meant to espouse, particularly fairness, justice and respect for others...

A few weeks later Sir Tim Brighouse published an article in the same newspaper to shed light on the causes of the scapegoating of the local Muslim community, which, in a major oversight, overlooked locating the affair within the long history of institutional racism that dominated the British education system.⁴² Nevertheless, Brighouse explained how during his time managing Birmingham's educational affairs, his team had been able to provide a supportive role to misbehaving governors, and despite encountering problems he found that "Invariably the motivation of the governors was commendable, namely to accelerate improvements in outcomes for their children." But with government enforced austerity only gathering pace he went on to say:

So great have been the recent cuts in local authority expenditure that Birmingham and many other local authorities have neither the resources nor sufficient senior and experienced staff to carry out their role effectively. Worse, the arrival of academies and free schools has created an open season for lay people and professionals keen to pursue their

⁴² Anthony Gunter, "Keeping it real: the experiences of black youth beyond criminal (in)justice statistics," *Criminal Justice Matters*, 101, 2015; Jessica Perera, "How Black Working-Class Youth are Criminalised and Excluded in the English School System," *Institute of Race Relations*, 2020.

own eccentric ideas about schooling; and when trust or governor vacancies occur, some perpetuate the very English tradition of inviting friends to join them. When the community is white it doesn't cause much comment. In mono-ethnic east Birmingham, however, it is seen as a Muslim plot to expose pupils to an undefined 'extremism'.

In short, the weight we are putting on voluntary governors in autonomous schools is too great for them to bear. We are the only developed country to rely on a governing body system. If we want to avoid future scandals, some form of local democratic accountability for all schools, separate from governors, is urgently needed. The locally elected authority, if properly resourced, is the obvious existing vehicle for doing that...⁴³

The issue of proper resourcing of public services remains an ongoing concern in the wake of the decisions taken by successive governments to starve local authorities of funding. This representing a pro big business policy choice that has intensified since the financial crash of 2008 that, tragically, will most certainly continue even if the Labour Party are elected to government later this year. Hence the issue of local authorities trying to cope with reduced resources at the very time when

⁴³ Sir Tim Brighouse, "Trojan horse affair: five lessons we must learn," *The Guardian*, June 17, 2014. He writes: "Of the 21 schools inspected, five of the six found to be inadequate are academies controlled by Gove. Yet he has diverted the main blame on to Birmingham city council, in fact to anyone other than himself." And on the religious controversy in so-called secular state schools, Brighouse said: "What is urgently needed, however, is an end to the requirement to have a daily act of worship 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' in community (non-faith) schools and academies. The right of heads to seek a 'determination' to change that was often a source of friction between them and Muslim governors in a predominantly Muslim school. It led the community quite naturally to think that religion, apart from the agreed syllabus, had legitimate wider influence on the curriculum. It does not. Legislation is now needed to replace the act of worship clause with the need to promote pluralism and respect for those with different faiths and none, while making sure that schools stand for those values that underpin a peaceful and civilised society."

the government was rushing through their academisation program clearly had a detrimental impact on the ability of Birmingham City Council (BCC) to manage their 437 schools. Thus, the city council's own report on the Trojan Horse affair (the Kershaw Report) stated:

It is clear from the evidence that resource restraints have resulted in limited oversight by BCC, with dramatic resource reductions being made in recent years. The evidence we have received is that from February 2011 to February 2014, BCC's Schools Improvement Team went from a staff of approximately 158 to 12, and the School and Governor Support Team went from approximately 16 to 8. (p.11)

More details on the scale of this problem can be obtained from the later work of Kamal Hanif OBE, who was one of the members of the Kershaw report group. Hanif, who had previously been employed as an educational adviser for Birmingham City Council, explained in his 2018 book, *British Pakistani Boys, Education and the Role of Religion: In the Land of the Trojan Horse*:

By the time I left my post as Adviser [to Birmingham City Council], in 2011, much of the [Local Authority's] equality-related work in education had ceased and the Black and Pakistani staff, who would normally lead on such initiatives, were made redundant in response to funding cuts, leaving a handful of mainly White staff in post. While the Council's Scrutiny Committee continued to receive reports on who was underachieving in the local schools, beyond this, the authority appeared to lack the resources to take any action as schools now controlled much of the funding. (p.15)

But returning to the highly critical 2014 Ofsted reports: it remained clear that it was not just Sir Tim Brighouse who was speaking out against the government's weaponising of the inspection agency. Indeed, many people were deeply shocked by the way in which schools previously rated as outstanding (like Park View) were now judged to be failing. This is because the primary reason for the drastic reversals owed to the Orwellian way in which Ofsted undertook their snap inspections: Ofsted had criticised the Birmingham schools for failing to follow PREVENT guidance that had yet to be issued. "In

fact, this guidance was not issued until July 2015 – more than a year after several of the schools had been inspected and downgraded by Ofsted for their failures to address extremism or to implement PREVENT.”⁴⁴ “In effect, Ofsted were sent in to find the schools guilty.”⁴⁵ This is precisely why the National Education Union continue to call for Ofsted to be scrapped and replaced with a democratic and useful alternative system for improving educational standards.⁴⁶

It remains apparent that even educational specialists with outstanding establishment credentials, like for instance, Colin Diamond, understand the way in which the Trojan Horse affair acted as a political football for the government. As Diamond stated in his 2022 book: “Let us be clear: Trojan Horse was never about Islamic extremism...” He instead explained that: “More broadly, Trojan Horse threw into sharp relief... [h]ow a neoliberal government opportunistically used the less edifying behaviours of some governors

⁴⁴ Holmwood and O’Toole, *Countering Extremism in British Schools? As they explain: ‘Park View was engaged in PREVENT activities. However, in the absence of a ‘benchmark’ stating what should be done, and what is done elsewhere, provision can always be said to be insufficient, even where it is greater than at other schools.’*

⁴⁵ Sarah Barton and Richard Hatcher, “The consequences of the Trojan Horse affair and a possible way forward for Birmingham,” *Forum*, 56(3), 2014, p.458.

⁴⁶ Throughout the Trojan Horse affair, local socialists and trade unionists played a critical role in working with community activists in fighting for justice. One useful overview of these interventions is provided in Professor Richard Hatcher’s article “The ‘Trojan Horse’ in Birmingham: the community fights back,” *Socialist Resistance*, June 23, 2014. Subsequent to the publication of Hatcher’s article, on June 26, 2014, the newly formed ‘Putting Birmingham School Kids First’ campaigning group held a packed meeting of around a thousand people which discussed how the local community could respond to the false Trojan Horse allegations. The meeting was co-chaired by former Respect councillor Salma Yaqoob and Andrew Smith from Saltley Methodist Church. The event included local Labour MP Shabana Mahmood and Kevin Courtney, Deputy General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) as their guest speakers, while Sir Tim Brighouse addressed the meeting with an online contribution.

in Birmingham to create an Islamophobic narrative for its own ends.”⁴⁷ He added that: “It was [Michael] Gove’s paranoia about the supposed scale of ‘rejectionist’ views within Britain’s Muslim communities that led to the commissioning” of Ofsted’s snap school inspections.⁴⁸

Interestingly, Diamond expounds these quite radical sounding beliefs at the same time as seemingly upholding the legitimacy of the Trojan Horse letter. He does this by asserting that “some [people are] still claiming that the letter was a hoax” before going on to conclude that “Trojan Horse was one attempt to hold on to an old order born of migration from rural Pakistan.”⁴⁹ That said, Diamond’s views remain in keeping with his establishment background, as this was the same individual who in 2011 had joined the Department of Education to head their academies and free schools education adviser team, and had then been “asked by the Department for Education to lead the team that went to Birmingham in the wake of the Trojan Horse crisis.”⁵⁰ All that considered, we can be thankful for small mercies that when Diamond published his edited text, *The Birmingham Book: Lessons in Urban Education Leadership and Policy from the Trojan Horse Affair* (2022), he included the writings of a handful of more critical authors. It is this work which sheds a little light on the events that unfolded so tragically in 2014.

Thus, linking back to the point about the way in which Ofsted inspections had criticised schools for not promoting yet to be published guidance, Professor Reza Gholami, who is the deputy director of the Centre for Research in Race and Education at the University of Birmingham, surmised that the Trojan Horse affair “was central in creating... an Islamophobic educational discourse.”

Put bluntly, Trojan Horse helped to clear the ground for the government’s counter-extremism policy, PREVENT, to become statutory. It made PREVENT seem totally rational,

⁴⁷ Colin Diamond, *The Birmingham Book: Lessons in Urban Education Leadership and Policy from the Trojan Horse Affair* (2022), p.3.

⁴⁸ Diamond, *The Birmingham Book*, p.14.

⁴⁹ Diamond, *The Birmingham Book*, p.14, p.369.

⁵⁰ Taken from his own biographical note in Diamond, *The Birmingham Book*, p.xxvi.

indeed necessary; not many people were going to question PREVENT after Trojan Horse, which was held up as a grim example of the dangers of not keeping tabs on Muslims. Before Trojan Horse, the government had signalled that it wanted to centralise PREVENT and extend its reach, but in 2014 PREVENT was not yet statutory. This happened more or less immediately after Trojan Horse, as the Counter Terrorism and Security Act came into law in February 2015.⁵¹

A related point is made by another contributor to *The Birmingham Book*, Dr Karamat Iqbal. A man of Christian faith who has long advised Birmingham City Council on educational matters, Dr Iqbal stated...

...it is worth referring to a [September 2014] report on the Trojan Horse affair made by Dr Mashuq Ally (who was assistant director of equalities, community safety and cohesion) and Wyn Williams (programme lead, education services) at Birmingham City Council. According to their findings, which resulted from meeting with Muslim community representatives, much of what had been criticised by Ofsted was ‘simply the schools responding to meet the needs of local Muslims’. They state that ‘schools should reflect the Muslim communities in which they are situated’ and express the belief that accommodation can be made for religious sensitivities on social issues within the mainstream state sector. Furthermore, they say that ‘religious conservatism should not be confused with extremism’. To do so, and to

⁵¹ Reza Gholami, “Reflections on the impact and legacy of Trojan Horse: an intersectional view,” in: Diamond (ed.), *The Birmingham Book*, p.293. pp.298-9. On the issue of creating an Islamophobic educational discourse Gholami explains that “post-Trojan Horse it has become quite easy for non-Muslims to imagine and talk about Islam and education as almost mutually exclusive categories and to think of Muslim people as somehow ‘anti-education’ or an educational ‘lost cause.’ In turn, this has helped to rationalise and formalise the singling out of Muslim students and the shutting down of ‘undesirable’ expressions of Muslimness via the PREVENT agenda.” As he adds, “such a discourse has no basis in reality”. (p.293)

respond to religion competently, requires a level of religious literacy.

Those on the receiving end of inspections have pointed out that Ofsted inspectors did not have a clue what they were looking for or at when they inspected the twenty-one schools in Spring 2014. They were found to have the most rudimentary of training and literacy in Islam and Muslims before going in and looking for manifestations of Islamic extremism.⁵²

It therefore remains highly significant that when all the evidence obtained about the Trojan Horse affair from Ofsted and the four other official investigations had been considered collectively by the House of Commons select committee (in March 2015) they “found no evidence of extremism in schools.”⁵³ The select committee’s report however did add:

We heard only one instance to the contrary: Ian Kershaw told us that he had evidence that a film promoting violent jihadist extremism had been shown to children in one classroom and the teacher had not been disciplined. The one example given by Ian Kershaw is clearly unacceptable and action should have been taken by the school to prevent it, but a single instance does not warrant headline claims that students in Birmingham—or elsewhere in England—are being exposed to extremism by their teachers.⁵⁴

⁵² Karamat Iqbal, “Unrepresentative and ill-equipped education bureaucracy,” in: Diamond (ed.), *The Birmingham Book*, p.62. Iqbal’s wife, Sue Iqbal, recently served as a trustee of a local Evangelical Christian church, Riverside.

⁵³ “Education - Seventh Report : Extremism in schools: the Trojan Horse affair,” House of Commons, March 2015.

⁵⁴ This point was noted in the oral evidence given Ian Kershaw on September 2, 2014; and when Parliament subsequently asked Peter Clarke about this single incident he replied “There was some suggestion that that sort of film had been shown or copied by a technician within one of the schools, but I did not come across direct evidence of the promotion of violent extremism, no.”

This example certainly sounds bad, but even this account of maleficence was completely inaccurate. This is because this illustration of so-called Islamic extremism was based upon “a report that IT technicians at Park View had recorded onto a DVD a terrorist video believed to be from Al Qaeda.” Yet this sensational claim, which was widely and uncritically reported in the press, was incomplete and therefore false.

[It] emerged that the recording was made at the request of West Midlands Counter Terrorism Unit to use as illustrative material in a session for pupils at the school on the risks of radicalisation. In other words, it was an example of the very opposite of what had been stated in the Clarke Report and reported in the press; it was an example of the school’s engagement with the PREVENT agenda.⁵⁵

Finally, it is important to recognise that the “government’s key witness in the Trojan horse teaching misconduct hearing” – a former staff member at Park View who remained anonymous and was simply known as Witness A – had, under cross examination, backtracked on some of the evidence that had received sensational media coverage. When asked “about her allegations that staff members received job offers because of their friendships with senior staff, including a claim that recruitment was conducted through Birmingham’s Green Lane mosque,” the witness admitted this assertion was based on hearsay.⁵⁶

Furthermore, it was evidence initially presented by Witness A that led the Clarke Report to claim that “On the lesson worksheets [for sex education lessons] it was written that if a woman said ‘No’ to sex with her husband, the Angel Gabriel would strike her down and condemn her to an eternity of hell.” However, under cross-examination “Witness A said she could not be sure the document had been distributed by the three [Muslim] teachers, and agreed that it could have been downloaded by a pupil outside of the school. ‘I

⁵⁵ Holmwood and O’Toole, *Countering Extremism in British Schools?*

⁵⁶ Richard Adams, “Witness in Trojan horse misconduct hearing accused of racial slurs,” *Guardian*, October 28, 2015.

suppose I could be wrong,' she said."⁵⁷ It is also troubling that it was the same witness who had asserted that Park View was "too religious" – a story that had been widely reported in the press – even though she said she had not understood what religious activities were lawful to promote within schools.⁵⁸ Thus the barrister (Andrew Faux) who cross-examined Witness A explained:

My questioning established that although she had a view that the school was too religious, it was not an informed one. Given the chance to read the relevant guidance, she had agreed that what she had seen in the school was in accordance with that guidance. She further undermined the credibility of the state's entire case by showing that what was included in the witness statement was not evidence from her but rather an inaccurate and misleading summary by the lawyer who had drafted it.

All of this should have been headline grabbing stuff. Witness A was a key witness. 'Key witness agrees that the school did nothing wrong' would have been a perfect acceptable summary of her account.⁵⁹

This same barrister would later publish a useful article titled "Michael Gove's 'brain flip' poisoned schools extremism debate" in the *Guardian* (July 4, 2017). This article took up some of the broader issues about misrepresentation of evidence. And a longer version of

⁵⁷ This revelation is presented in Richard Adams article which had the misleading title "Trojan horse teachers 'gave pupils handout saying wives cannot refuse sex'," *Guardian*, October 14, 2015.

⁵⁸ Although not related to Witness A, other evidence alleged that two Park View teachers had altered the school curriculum "to exclude proper teaching of sex and relationship education". And while both teachers were initially banned from teaching (for life), the following year the high court overturned their bans, with the judge saying there was "considerable doubt as to the fairness of proceeding first against teachers". Richard Adams, "High court overturns lifetime bans for Trojan horse teachers," *Guardian*, October 13, 2016.

⁵⁹ Andrew Faux, QC, "What Policy Exchange misses about how the inquiries into the Birmingham Trojan Horse affair misled witnesses and the public," *JohnHolmwood.net*, Date Unknown (Accessed February 25, 2024).

this *Guardian* article featured on the authors blog contains the following important information that didn't make the newspaper piece.

A brief word about an aspect of Peter Clarke's report that perhaps highlights the problem in asking a policeman to investigate matters of educational practice. He conducted an investigation that took evidence from a wide range of people concerned about events in Birmingham. That included a retired teacher whose evidence was then relied on by government appointed lawyers seeking the prohibition from teaching of a succession of Park View Headteachers. That teacher's evidence to the regulatory panel was that raising attainment amongst pupils at Park View was impossible as, given where they came from, they were not capable of achieving good results. We called evidence from Sir Tim Brighouse, former Chief Education Officer of Birmingham. He told the panel that such racist views had not been uncommon and had persisted over time. Once it was the Irish who were at fault for leaving school with no qualifications, then it was the Pakistanis, then the Somalis. No doubt in turn the children of Syrians will be blamed for our failure to educate them. The trust and reliance placed upon such a witness by first the Clarke enquiry, and subsequently those responsible for presenting the case for the prohibition of the accused teachers, illustrates the real damage done by not placing an educationalist at the heart of the enquiry.⁶⁰

Issues of Racism and Extremism

It is now abundantly clear that the national moral panic generated by the Trojan Horse affair primarily arose as a response to the fact that members of the Muslim community had begun to take affirmative action to defend their communities' own interests in the face of decades of racism. This vital context is partially described by Kamal Hanif OBE in his chapter of Diamond's book. Hanif is a proud

⁶⁰ Faux, "Every school is meant to be religious," *The Reflective Practice*, November 8, 2017.

Muslim teacher who “was born, grew up” and still lives in the community of Small Heath, a location which was situated at the epicentre of the Trojan Horse affair: a teacher whose establishment credentials meant that in mid-2014, he had been chosen to be parachuted in Park View school to supposedly rescue the community from Tahir Alam.

When it comes to outlining Birmingham’s legacy of educational racism, Hanif recalls that he had taken up his “first teaching post” at Saltley School in 1993 as “one of the few BAME teachers and the only one from the local community.” Relatively speaking, this school was considered “progressive” but even so, he remembered that while “female colleagues often spoke to me... White male staff tended not to talk to anyone from a BAME background”.⁶¹ Things hardly improved after 9/11. Hanif explained:

In the autumn of 2003, I started my new role as deputy headteacher at Park View School - the school that became the centre of the Trojan Horse affair. On the day of my interview, a member of staff came up to the candidates and handed us all a letter. I didn’t read it, but some did, and they rescinded their applications. As I understand, the letter was offensive about the community and staff from ethnic minorities - and about Muslims in particular - stating that they were going to ‘take over the school’. This resulted in a number of court hearings against the school. I could see the terrible toll it took on the headteacher, Lindsey Clark, who stood against racist behaviour. (p.44)

It seems likely that the racist letter in question was distributed by Michael White, whose own personal story came out of the woodwork in April 2014. But when White was belatedly interviewed by the BBC about his past work as a teacher they chose to lead with the ludicrous headline “Birmingham 'Trojan Horse' plot 'started 20 years ago'.” The BBC article then uncritically reported how “Michael White, who was dismissed in 2003 from Park View School, in Alum Rock, said its board of governors was ‘taken over by a Muslim sect’ in 1993.” The

⁶¹ Kamal Hanif, “Growing up in Birmingham: place and identity,” in Diamond (ed.), *The Birmingham Book*, p.41.

article failed to publish any information from other members of staff that might have undermined the validity of this inflammatory accusation, although they did add that in 2003 White “was dismissed for gross misconduct after he handed a letter to prospective teachers advising them to question the governors”.

Returning to Hanif’s narrative, it is therefore not surprising to find out that White was not the only problem in the school.

Some Park View staff clearly held racist and bigoted views. I recall a member of staff talking within earshot of me about a social event for ‘White colleagues’, and how she ‘enjoyed being racist’. Later, the same individual brought a grievance through her union, claiming that it was ‘threatening for White women to have a Muslim deputy headteacher because of 9/11’. (p.45)

In 2005, Hanif was subsequently promoted to become the head at Waverley School, which was one of the schools inspected during the Trojan Horse affair – although Waverley was ignored in the press because it obtained an outstanding Ofsted rating. Hanif recalled:

At this time, as a result of the anti-Muslim rhetoric whipped up by former Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove and the round of twenty-one Ofsted inspections, I faced considerable racist behaviour from some teaching union reps because of my submissions, and I did not receive responses to my letters of complaint to their executive officers. A systematic campaign to incite my staff [at Waverly School] to rebel and remove me from my job took off, simply because I was Muslim and therefore must be part of a clandestine conspiracy to turn my school into a Muslim enclave. (p.46)

In July 2014 Hanif would return to Park View as the temporary chair of their new board of governors – a position he held until March 2015. But while Hanif frames his experience in Birmingham’s schools as a time beset by racism, some fairer-skinned educationalists held a different view. One such person was Revd John Ray who in October 2013 had resigned in protest from the board of governors of Golden Hillock School as the school was being absorbed into Park View

Educational Trust.⁶² Golden Hillock being one of the five schools that was to subsequently be rated “inadequate” by Ofsted in Spring 2014.⁶³ Revd Ray however was unusual individual in many respects, and a report published by the Department for Education in 2015 noted how Revd Ray had been among a handful of senior leaders placed in three Birmingham schools who had written “to education Ministers in 1994... expressing their concerns about the extremist group Hizb-ut-Tahrir gaining an influence over schools in the city.”⁶⁴ Then, just prior to the release of the controversial Ofsted snap inspections of 2014, Revd Ray spoke to *Sky News* (on June 2) where he said:

[The Trojan Horse affair] reveals something, something that is true. And it reveals a mess that the city council has not been able to check - the development of this whole infiltration of this ceding in of governors of one particular ideology who have presumed that they could just take over. They are quite right to presume it because we allowed them to just take over. They are not people who have the welfare of these children at heart.⁶⁵

In the interest of some bizarre form of balance, the *Sky News* report noted:

But Mr Ray's claims are disputed by Mohammed Shafique, another former chair of governors of Golden Hillock School.

⁶² Prior to moving to Birmingham in 1987 Revd Ray had lived in Pakistan for 25 years where he had been the principal of a school in Kashmir that was run by the Church of England. Then in 1991, shortly after moving to Birmingham, Revd Ray became the chair of governors of the largely Muslim Golden Hillock School – a position he held until 2001 when he became an ordinary governor.

⁶³ To read the school's immediate response to this downgrading, see “Statement from Park View Educational Trust on Ofsted reports on Park View, Golden Hillock and Nansen schools.”

⁶⁴ Department for Education, “Review into possible warnings to DfE relating to extremism in Birmingham schools,” January 2015.

⁶⁵ Afua Hirsch, “‘Muslim school plot’ fears were raised in 1994,” *Sky News*, June 2, 2014.

He said: 'John Ray never expressed any concerns, never asked "why have you joined the governing body?" Never asked me about my views, what my ideology was for joining the governing body. I'm quite concerned that he can actually say there was a mass movement to go into governing bodies. I certainly haven't experienced it at Golden Hillock School, or another school I was governor at.'

Following these revelations, the local Liberal Democrat MP for Yardley, John Hemming, defended Mohammed Shafique's reputation stating that he was "a well known local Labour Party activist who has been chair of Sparkbrook Labour Party."⁶⁶ Likewise the Labour MP for Birmingham Hall Green, Roger Godsiff, spoke in Parliament (on June 9) stating how his constituents "cannot understand the picture that has been painted of [Golden Hillock's] governors, including the chairman, Mohammed Shafique, and others whom I know, who have been at the forefront of fighting radicalism and terrorism in local communities."

Nevertheless, writing in 2016 – talking with reference to Tahir Alam's activities – Revd Ray described how when he worked for Golden Hillock School (whose board he'd first joined in 1991)...

We kept a wary eye open in selection of governors, as it appeared that someone had a relationship with the City of Birmingham Education Department, and was feeding governors of that particular tendency into schools.

Around 2006 the then chair of Golden Hillock recommended a young teacher with Park View connections as

⁶⁶ Jonathan Walker, "Birmingham school led by Labour activist and Sikh head is NOT extremist, insists MP," *BusinessLive*, June 6, 2014. Despite Golden Hillock's chair of governors being a leading Labour Party activist, right-wing leaders of the national Labour Party were happy to throw Mohammed Shafique under the bus. "Labour officials in London released a statement condemning Education Secretary Michael Gove for allowing the school to be taken over by hard-liners, apparently accepting as fact the claims in the leaked Ofsted report."

a governor. Whatever else, he was certainly an activist and was quickly made chairman.

One or two similarly-minded new governors appeared and from then on it was mostly downhill. Governors meetings became long sessions of repeated questions: confrontation replaced cooperation as the norm, though it was clear to me that our local British Pakistani members were in no way extremist, nor particularly conservative. They just wanted a fast improving school...

Here Revd Ray makes it clear that first and foremost the so-called Muslim infiltrators were not “particularly conservative” and had “just wanted a fast improving school”. This point is significant as it is true that in the year prior to Golden Hillock being subsumed within Park View Education Trust, the issue of educational attainment had been a primary cause for concern for all involved with the school. Thus “On 28 August 2012, the year after Park View celebrated its best-ever GCSE results, 50 parents and students gathered outside Golden Hillock, three miles south of Park View, to protest against poor results.”⁶⁷ Revd Ray’s school was at the time seemingly in decline: a point further emphasised when an Ofsted inspection undertaken in January 2013 downgraded the school – a result which led the head teacher at Golden Hillock, Matthew Scarrott, to hand in his resignation. These problems contrasted sharply with the fast-improving results at Park View school (whose governing body was led by Tahir Alam) and explains why Park View Educational Trust – with the active support of the government – was allowed to step in to run Golden Hillock as an emergency measure. Following this government-backed takeover, which soon involved the schools academisation,

⁶⁷ Samira Shackle, “Trojan horse: the real story behind the fake ‘Islamic plot’ to take over schools,” *Guardian*, September 1, 2017. Shackle notes: “Headteacher Matthew Scarrott blamed harsh new marking criteria. Tension had been building between governors and senior leadership, and Scarrott later said that governors had mobilised parents to push him out. (Faraz was still on the board of governors at this point, but says he was only aware of the protests afterwards, and that the governors who had been involved were reprimanded.) In March 2013, Scarrott resigned.”

Revd Ray resigned in frustration. As fate would have it, the next month the hoax Trojan Horse letter was then posted anonymously to Birmingham City Council.⁶⁸

Certainly, there seems to have been a great deal of misunderstandings on the part of white Christians like Revd Ray who saw it as their mission to teach in poor largely non-white communities. Another such individual who met this same criteria was Tim Boyes, who prior to becoming the head at Queensbridge School (in January 2004) had acted as the deputy head at Golden Hillock where he would have rubbed shoulders with Revd Ray.⁶⁹ In summarising the entire

⁶⁸ The new Acting Headteacher was Hardeep Saini, who was a Sikh by faith.

⁶⁹ Tim Boyes would later join the board of trustees of the religious community group known as the Springfield Project in 2021. This is the same group that Revd John Ray helped organise at the time both he and Boyes were associated with Golden Hillock School. Around the time that Boyes worked at Golden Hillock, Revd Ray had helped found the Springfield Project (while he was worshipping at St Christopher's Church), and in an interview with fellow missionaries Revd Ray discussed how the city council had given the Project a £2 million grant despite the Springfield Project being situated in the mainly Muslim area of Sparkhill. In the same interview Revd Ray recalled how: "I was still a governor at Golden Hillock and we had Trojan Horse.... There was an influence there that I think was politicised. I had seen something of it in Kashmir, linked I would think originally in thinking with the Jamaat Islam.... I found myself painfully caught up in it. I found myself lacking in sufficient love for my fellow governors, and I think the reason was that I was so keen on the Springfield Project that I wasn't thinking about the school and so when it struck difficulty, I wasn't close enough to it, ... and I do not feel proud of my efforts at that time." "Dr Karamat Iqbal in conversation: with Revd John Ray OBE - a life in mission," *Mahabba Network*, September 22, 2021, 1.22hr onwards.

Like many well-paid head teachers, Tim Boyes maintains leisure interests that his poor working-class students would normally likely never get the chance to participate in, with a good example in Boyes' case being sailing. But Boyes tries to share his sailing experiences with his students, as for many years has chaired The *Enterprise Sailing* Trust - a charity which aims to "use sailing to develop life skills, confidence and character among young people, especially those at risk of exclusion." (One of the three other trustees of this group is Andrew Faux, QC, the individual who provided the legal defence

Trojan Horse affair, Samira Shackle – who one of the few mainstream journalists who provided a useful analysis of the entire affair (despite overlooking the involvement of Revd Ray) – observed:

One of the first people to raise concerns about the growing influence of Islam in schools in Birmingham was Tim Boyes, a former headteacher, who is now chief executive of the Birmingham Education Partnership, a non-profit company [that he] established in 2013 to improve schools. Boyes started teaching in Birmingham in 1987, and has spent most of his career in schools where the majority of students have Pakistani heritage. He recalls instances as far back as the early 1990s when parents clashed with teachers over issues such as hymns being sung in assembly, or teachers keeping wine in the staffroom. ‘Folk in a leadership position [in Birmingham] have not always known well how to respond to a culturally unfamiliar set of behaviours,’ he told me.

These tensions rumbled on in the background alongside the push for greater civic engagement in schools. ‘[Tahir] Alam caused me concern over many years,’ says Boyes. ‘He was very deliberately and strategically looking for people to be embedded in the education system.’ While Boyes felt that part

for many of the accused teachers in the Trojan Horse affair.) This sailing charity had been founded in 1993 by Bishop Michael Whinney and Rev Bob Shepton, a retired school chaplain; Boyes then took responsibility for managing the charity from 2007 onwards. It is noteworthy that Rev Shepton was an archetypal white Christian leader, who in his youth had trained as a Commando before gravitating to education. Rev Shepton however was always honest about his privilege and in the opening paragraph of his 2014 book, *Addicted to Adventure: Between Rocks and Cold Places*, he wrote: “I was born in 1935 in Batu Gajah, Malaya – now Malaysia, although then a British colony – where my father managed a rubber plantation some twenty miles from Kuantan on the east coast. Memories of my early childhood remain vivid to this day: sitting on my father’s shoulders one evening, surveying the perimeter of the estate; ‘coolies’ rushing from the factory shed to stop me from poking a stick at a cobra coiled on the road; diagonal grooves cut in the rubber trees, dripping latex sap into a cup set low on their trunks. And I have flashbacks of our house, inside and out, and of my dear Amah, a sort of Chinese nanny, who looked after me.”

of Alam's mission was 'hostility to the establishment', Alam characterises himself as an educational insider. 'It was government policy that there should be an increase of ethnic representation,' Alam says. 'This was something local authorities were measured and inspected against. There was nothing clandestine about it.' In 2007, Alam was invited to Downing Street to meet Blair, in recognition of his work on diversity.

Later the journalist added how...

...In 2010, [Boyes] gave a three-hour presentation to then schools minister Jonathan Hill. 'I was saying, "You don't understand how dangerous the language of benign Anglicanism is when it's in the hands of Salafists from a Pakistani or Yemeni background,"' Boyes told me. 'You don't understand how problematic it is when schools think they can do their own thing and communities can run their own schools.'⁷⁰

Part of Boyes' broader concerns, like those held by many others, also related to the chaotic and undemocratic nature of the academisation process itself, but Boyes was clearly upset by the newfound assertiveness of Muslims.⁷¹ Moreover, it is relevant that Boyes' vocal warnings about the threat posed by internationally funded Islamic activities had drawn directly upon the life experiences of Revd John Ray. When Boyes was interviewed about his views on these international problems, his interviewer, Kamal Hanif, noted that Boyes "did admit to me that this was an area he knew the least about." Hanif then quoted Boyes as saying:

⁷⁰ Samira Shackle, "Trojan horse: the real story behind the fake 'Islamic plot' to take over schools," *Guardian*, September 1, 2017.

⁷¹ A useful discussion of Tim Boyes' racism is presented in Professor Gus John's blog post "Trojan Horses' and policing 'extremism' in schools," June 7, 2014. (Gus John provides a list of critical Trojan Horse articles covering the period March-July 2014, here.) John's follow-up article is also worth a read, "After Trojan Horse: Ofsted on the gallop," November 2014.

John [Ray] would say that there are internationally funded activities that are much more serious... but I don't know about that. I talked about John. I took with me copies of letters which John had written to Baroness Cox in the early 90s and John always had that kind of perspective.⁷²

Either way, when Boyes delivered his three-hour presentation to the Department for Education, Boyes recalled that “for most of the time the dominant presence was Elena Narozanski who was then a personal adviser to Mr Gove”. In his interview with Hanif, Boyes said that Narozanski had “told me how interested in this subject Mr Gove was.” But to Boyes’ dismay, he never heard back from Gove or anyone else at the DfE: this was despite the fact that Boyes “had described a ‘bloodless coup’ at one Birmingham school and ‘an alliance to destabilise the head’ at another.”⁷³ Indeed, Boyes’ warnings aside, one of the concluding slides delivered in his 2010 presentation stated: “The left has failed; traditionally welcoming others they are guilty of uncritical welcoming, unmanaged in an environment that now leaves professionals dumb. The last [Labour] government allowed narrow and flawed measures to drown out all else.”⁷⁴ This is true. But what is

⁷² Hanif, *British Pakistani Boys, Education and the Role of Religion*, p.28. Baroness Cox happens to be a hard-right Christian Zionist.

⁷³ In May 2014 Tim Boyes had explained to the media that: “Back in 2010, I had a whole series of colleagues, other head teachers, who were reporting concerns about governance and things that weren’t going well in their schools. Over 20 years... tensions and politics have exploded and as a result head teachers have had nervous breakdowns, they’ve lost their jobs, schools have been really torn apart.” Jeanette Oldham, “Trojan Horse investigation: School head warned over signs of extremism four years ago,” *Birmingham Mail*, May 31, 2014.

⁷⁴ As John Holmwood writes: “Boyes’s presentation to the DfE began from the Policy Exchange analysis and set out how the ethnic minority presence in Birmingham had grown, together with communities increasingly living parallel lives. He also argued that activists from within the Muslim community were putting pressure on schools, through governors linked with the Muslim Council of Britain, and that there was pressure to introduce Islamic collective worship in schools. Boyes argued that there was a specific problem of Muslim-majority schools to which the answer was that ‘schools in the Pakistani dominated wards need to be robustly linked, not done to, with

not clear is what Boyes was really expecting the Conservative government to do about this problem.

Furthermore, although no specific school names were mentioned in Boyes DfE presentation, he did have personal experience of such issues. This is because in 2008 Boyes had served as the interim head at Moseley School following the resignation of David Peck, who had acted as their head teacher for seven years. This case is connected to the Trojan Horse affair because in 2014 a right-wing tabloid argued that Peck's resignation had resulted from the actions of Muslim governors who wanted the Muslim majority school to request permission to adopt the appropriate religious assemblies – a not unreasonable request by any means.⁷⁵

outer schools' (ie schools serving predominantly white pupils). In other words, trusts made up of Muslim-majority schools were potentially problematic, but this could be mitigated by placing Muslim majority schools in Trusts where the other schools, including the lead school, were white-majority." ("The Trojan Horse affair; an official's version," *Discover Society*, September 2022.)

⁷⁵ Shortly after David Peck had resigned, Moseley School had "fallen under the scope of the [Labour] Government's National Challenge Programme, which targets schools where fewer than 30 per cent of pupils gain five 'good' GCSEs including English and maths." This then led Birmingham City Council's Tory cabinet member for education, Councillor Les Lawrence, to push forward a "proposal to turn Moseley into a Trust School – a state-funded foundation school supported by a charitable trust – [which] was bitterly opposed by the 12-strong Governing body." As reported in the press at the time: "Sacked parent-governor Dr David Simones-Jones accused the council of conducting a 'hatchet job' on the school and pointed out that GCSE results at Moseley were already improving before the decision to go for Trust status was approved." "Moseley School row hits Birmingham's Tory-LibDem partnership," *BusinessLive*, June 2, 2010. The same parent governor quoted above also played a central role in organising the protest against what he considered to be the forcible removal of David Peck in late 2008. At the time this led David Simones-Jones to describe Peck's decision to resign "as a 'disgrace'" as he "said that Mr Peck was doing an excellent job as head." (*Birmingham Mail*, December 18, 2008) Following the reporting of this comment, his 12-year old daughter, Eden Simones-Jones, led a protest of more than one hundred students outside Moseley school in protest at

Finally, it remains intriguing that long before the Trojan Horse affair kicked off, one of the most famous cases involving an accusation of Muslim plotters focused on events that unfolded in 2002 at Washwood Heath Technology College – a Birmingham school in which 85% of pupils came from “minority ethnic groups, with 72% speaking English as their second language.” In this case it was reported that teachers had “claimed they were being targeted by a ‘Muslim clique’ of school governors, pushing for the introduction of Muslim assemblies.”⁷⁶ However, the same article quoted Professor Tim Brighouse, the then chief education officer for Birmingham City Council, as saying:

I don't think it was racially motivated. When there's a breakdown of understanding of roles between governors and managers, it's easy to assume the causes. But such breakdowns occur in white schools, mixed schools and black schools.

In this case the college's head had resigned in December 2001 along with “half of his [schools] staff” – before he went on to co-ordinate the government's education strategy for pupils aged 11 to 14 in Birmingham. A new head was then recruited into post and a new interim board of governors was appointed by the city council with new additions to the board including Tahir Alam and a Christian former head teacher named Cecil Knight OBE who served as the college's new chair.⁷⁷ These positive changes soon led the school to announce that they “plan[ned] to introduce Muslim morning assemblies

Peck's abrupt resignation. (*Birmingham Mail*, December 19, 2008) Two years later his daughter was again at the forefront of organising another protest, this time however the protest was to stop the sacking of the board of governors and the forceable merger with Queensbridge School which was likewise opposed by her father who said it amounted to an “unholy marriage”. (*Birmingham Mail*, March 3, 2010)

⁷⁶ “Axe falls on problem governors,” *Guardian*, July 24, 2002.

⁷⁷ The Clarke Report (2014) would recap the details of this case observing that “In 2002, Ofsted inspectors put [Washwood] school in special measures. Tahir Alam was appointed onto an Interim Executive Board (IEB) in 2002 and left the governing body in 2014.”

alongside those that are Christian-based”⁷⁸ – which did indeed represent a positive step forward. But what is notable is that when the controversy first made the national news (in 2002), the media pushed the now familiar narrative about Muslim hidden agendas. And when the Trojan Horse story eventually broke in 2014, the Washwood ‘plot’ was quickly revived in yet another sensationalist media report which failed to seriously investigate any of the details of the case, let alone mention the fact that Alam had been tasked with resolving Washwood’s problem.⁷⁹

A New Trojan Horse

Whatever concerns Tim Boyes and other teaching staff had about undue Muslim influence in Muslim majority schools, it should be emphasised that such fears had been stoked (if not manufactured) by the relentless Islamophobia of both the government and the mainstream media. So considering the fact that it was Boyes own revelations that had fuelled the paranoid fires of the Trojan Horse affair, critical observers were rightly suspicious when Boyes’ own educational organisation was “commissioned by Birmingham City Council to implement a £11.7 million school improvement plan in the wake of the alleged plot by hardline Muslims to take control of governing bodies.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ “Axe falls on problem governors,” *Guardian*, July 24, 2002.

⁷⁹ Sarah Cassidy, “School board to be sacked for ‘Muslim only’ agenda,” *Independent*, August 10, 2002; Hannah Hiles, “Ex-council official: ‘I saw head being forced out of school by dirty tricks TEN years ago’,” *Birmingham Mail*, March 22, 2014. The earlier 2002 article summarised the issue like this: “A damning report for the city’s education authority into Washwood Heath Technology College found that a group of Muslim governors with a ‘hidden agenda’ was trying to turn it into a Muslim-only school.”

⁸⁰ Emma McKinney, “Trojan Horse One Year On: Headteacher who warned the government five years ago reveals plans to create ‘families’ of schools,” *Birmingham Mail*, April 23, 2015. In late 2013, local campaigners placed important demands on the Birmingham Education Partnership noting that: “As a matter of principle governors, teachers, parents, communities must have a voice, alongside headteachers, in the strategic leadership of education

Established by Boyes in 2013, his Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) was thus tasked, amongst other things, with now teaching school leaders and students the “skills to ‘cope with radicalisation’”.⁸¹ Likewise it didn’t help that the same Muslim individual who was chosen to replace Tahir Alam as the chair of Park View Educational Trust’s board of governors was soon directly involved in promoting the government’s arguably racist anti-radicalisation initiatives. Alam’s replacement being a local head teacher named Kamal Hanif, who after spending nine months as Park View’s chairman resigned for “personal family reasons,”⁸² to then run a series of PREVENT-related “seminars in June and July [2015] alongside counter-extremism campaigner Sara Khan” - Khan being a controversial supporter of PREVENT.⁸³

And while PREVENT continues to be used by the government to divide working class communities, another related narrative that has been mobilised by the government sow divisions amongst our

in the city. The reasons are two-fold: it is a democratic right, and it is a practical necessity if we are to build the active involvement of the whole community in raising standards, tackling inequality, and making Birmingham a ‘learning city’.” “The new Birmingham Education Partnership,” *Birmingham Campaign for State Education*, November 20, 2013.

⁸¹ The founding CEO of the Birmingham Education Partnership was Alastair Falk, who prior to taking up this post had been the Director of Partnerships for Jewish Schools, a grouping which he had helped establish in 2012. Falk was best-known for being England’s highest paid head teacher who became renowned for his tough approach to managing students. Richard Garner, “Britain’s highest-paid head triples school’s exclusions,” *Independent*, August 4, 2005.

⁸² Emma McKinney, “Head teacher parachuted in to turn around three Trojan Horse school resigns,” *Birmingham Mail*, April 17, 2015.

⁸³ Emma McKinney, “Waverley School headteacher Kamal Hanif to lead seminars to stop pupils being radicalised,” *Birmingham Mail*, May 26, 2015. Hanif and Khan would go on to serve on the government’s so-called “Community Engagement Forum”; while to this day both are still listed as supporters of a charity called Since 9/11. Britain’s Muslim community has of course criticised the government’s PREVENT programme because of the way it demonises them, and in opposing this so-called counter-extremism programme they continue to be joined by socialists and trade unionists.

communities concerns their demonising of the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) community.⁸⁴ Again, when viewed from a historical perspective, the scapegoating of oppressed groups around gender issues has been longstanding, and one of the most enduring examples of this revolves around the demonisation of women. In this regard conservative Christians remain at the forefront of the anti-feminist blame-game, with an international far-right coalition known as the World Congress on Families representing “one of the major driving forces behind the U.S. Religious Right’s global export of homophobia and sexism.”⁸⁵ And while socialists have always

⁸⁴ For earlier efforts by the US government to malign the LGBTQ+ community, see Karen Graves, *And They Were Wonderful Teachers: Florida's Purge of Gay and Lesbian Teachers* (2009); and David Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (2006).

⁸⁵ The 2017 book, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, edited by Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, traces the emergence of the anti-gender ideology movement from its crude reemergence from within the halls of the Vatican “and more particularly to the elaboration of a counter-strategy after the 1994 UN conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the 1995 Beijing conference on women.” (p.9) The latter two conferences promoted a neoliberal version of feminism which led to new alliances between the Vatican and Muslim countries in opposition to what they refer to as “contraceptive imperialism”. Elora Shehabuddin, *Sisters in the Mirror: A History of Muslim Women and the Global Politics of Feminism* (2021), pp.260-8.

For populist conservatives pushing their anti-gender ideology movement: “The nostalgia for a lost golden age, where everything was simpler and genders were what they looked like, may also nourish a quest for firmer foundations when everything is disappearing”; while “contested and uncertain masculinities, especially when they intertwine with inverted social mobility or perceived cultural threats, further strengthen these dynamics.” (*Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe*, p.14) It of course remains true that in a time when the global forces of capitalism are in crisis, working-class men can be turned against women who are fighting for equality, especially when conservatives argue that gains for women are part of some globalist conspiracy against men. In the US context, the nuances of these dynamics have been thoughtfully documented in Susan Faludi’s 1999 book *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the*

been highly critical of liberal, pro-capitalist, and racist forms of feminism, socialists are clear that it is entirely counterproductive to engage in such victim-blaming. Instead, socialist feminists insist that the blame for the massive attacks on the living standards of the working-class, the atomisation of individuals, and the intensification of everyone's exploitation, must be laid clearly at the doors of those (mostly male) capitalist elites who continue to wage a class war upon ordinary people.⁸⁶

In recent decades conservative activists from within both religious and secular communities have spread many lies about the so-called "gay agenda" and its alleged efforts to destroy modern society.⁸⁷ In the context of the British education system, the perpetuation of such lies led Margaret Thatcher's government to implement the Tories Section 28 ruling - that is, legislation that effectively criminalised the discussion of LGBTQ+ issues in British schools. At that time, Section 28's most powerful supporters had been conservative Christians, but other religious groups threw their support behind its maintenance too, which included elements of Britain's Muslim community. Nevertheless, after a long campaign that was led by ordinary gay activists and trade unionists, politicians were finally forced to drop this toxic legislation, such that in 2003, after much dithering on the part of Tony Blair's Labour Party, Section 28 was finally repealed in England and Wales.

Since then political elites of all the warmongering political parties have at times tried to pose as humanitarians by supporting certain LGBTQ+ related reforms while hypocritically stripping state funding from LGBTQ+ support services and attacking the working

American Man. (Prior to writing *Stuffed* Faludi had written a defence of feminism in her 1991 book *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*.)

⁸⁶ Christine Thomas, *It Doesn't Have to be Like This: Women and the Struggle for Socialism* (2010).; and *Socialist Feminism and the New Women's Movement* (2018).

⁸⁷ Didi Herman, *The Antigay Agenda: Orthodox Vision and the Christian Right* (1997). For the history of right-wing attacks on homosexuals and how ordinary people organised to defend their communities, see Nicola Field, *Over the Rainbow: Money Class and Homophobia* (1995).

class more generally.⁸⁸ In 2017, Theresa May, in a temporary effort to soften the Tories public image as the “nasty party” even declared that she would be pushing for limited reforms to the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) – promoting reforms that would have enabled trans individuals to legally change their gender without needing a medical diagnosis. But May’s superficial commitment to trans rights ultimately proved hollow. Thus, in the context of a deepening global economic crisis, the Tories have once again reverted to their normal habits, and along with the Labour Party are now pushing ahead with their US-inspired culture wars against the so-called “LGBT lobby”.⁸⁹

The disturbing legacy of Section 28 now looms large, and so the

⁸⁸ After the repeal of Section 28, the idea that humans who did not identify as heterosexual should not be victimised and bullied by the state came to be publicly embraced by the political leaders of all capitalist political parties. In 2009, even Conservative Party leader David Cameron felt it politically expedient to apologise for previously voting against the repeal of Section 28 (which he had done as late as 2003). Likewise, Cameron had always maintained how proud he was of his role in passing legislation in 2013 that legalised same-sex marriage; even though at the same time, it was his government that was overseeing the defunding of all manner of vital community services (including LGBTQ+ support groups) allowing the redistribution of wealth upwards from the working class to the ruling class.

⁸⁹ Tony Blair’s New Labour were proud of their role in implementing the 2010 Equality Act, which represented an “important piece of legislation [which] for the first time granted legal parity between transgender people and those with other ‘protected characteristics’” However, while capitalist politicians may, at times, happily pass progressive legislation to burnish their public image, they continue to promote inequality. As Laura Miles writes in *Transgender Resistance*, New Labour’s “intention to foster and promote equality has hardly seen the light of day,” when it “was undermined” after the New Labour government “collapsed the various independent Equality Commissions, covering disability, race, etc, into one understaffed and under-resourced new body, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).” Miles adds: “The EHRC was set up in 2007 under the Equality Act 2006 and the serious impact of austerity, begun under the New Labour government in 2008, immediately contributed to undermining the necessary resources for LGBT+ people. Subsequent Coalition and Tory governments have continued cutting resources to the bone and beyond.”

latest moral panic pushed by the elite class revolves around the demonisation of transsexuals. As Laura Miles explains in her useful book *Transgender Resistance: Socialism and the Fight for Trans Liberation* (2020), “a significant assault has been mounted on trans people’s rights and aspirations” – an attack whose launch dates to “around the middle of 2016”.⁹⁰ This manufactured panic started by attacking “some fairly limited proposals” (like those amendments supported by Theresa May) to reform the Gender Recognition Act.

[But since then]...coverage of trans issues became increasingly strident and negative Newspapers and media outlets have routinely carried scaremongering half-truths, distortions and outright transphobic smear pieces seeking to paint trans people and their organisations as gender zealots out to corrupt the minds and bodies of vulnerable and impressionable young people. Apparently, it is claimed, we are trying to undermine ‘our’ family values and generally bring civilisation as we know it to an untimely and sticky end.

Similarly, as Shon Faye points out in her book *The Transgender Issue: An Argument for Justice* (2021):

By the end of the 2010s, trans people weren’t the occasional freak show in the pages of a red-top tabloid. Rather, we were in the headlines of almost every major newspaper every single day. We were no longer portrayed as the ridiculous but unthreatening provincial mechanic who was having a ‘sex swop’; now, we were depicted as the proponents of a powerful new ‘ideology’ that was capturing institutions and dominating

⁹⁰ Christine Burns provides a history of anti-trans reporting in an employment tribunal “witness statement” that was published online in 2019. On the providence of the renewed attacks of recent years she notes: “The roots of what may be characterised as a ‘trans backlash’ appear in retrospect to have been sown in 2015 and they are not specifically because of the actions of trans people or any legislative moves. The context is that trans people were suddenly becoming more visible globally in the popular media.” She points out that “the *Times* coverage of these affairs since late 2016 and the beginning of 2017 is of a level sufficient to qualify as a vendetta.”

public life. No longer something to be jeered at, we were instead something to be feared. (p.5)

The mainstream press and politicians – with the active backing of some misinformed feminists – have now created a new ‘folk devil,’ spreading fear about the alleged power of the so-called ‘trans Taliban’ – a vile term of abuse coined by a reactionary liberal feminist (Julie Bindel). Reminiscent of the propaganda used associate all Muslims with their so-called “grooming gangs,” “[h]ostile media headlines regularly use the word ‘grooming’ to describe the supposed influence of ‘the trans lobby’ over children: a term that intentionally hints at sexual predation.”⁹¹ For example, one conspiratorial headline featured in the *Daily Telegraph* recently asserted “The trans movement is a Trojan horse designed to confuse children” (December 22, 2023).⁹²

⁹¹ Faye, *The Transgender Issue*, p.37. Faye explains: “Between 2015 and 2020, 10,478 children (defined as under eighteen) were referred to England’s Gender Identity Development Service. The total child population of England is approximately 12 million. So, even with the increased numbers of children who are presenting to the NHS with gender issues, and even if all of them are persistently identifying as trans, these referrals would constitute at most approximately 0.09 per cent of the total child population of England. The influence of LGBTQ+ organizations over schools – almost invariably portrayed as nefarious – is also exaggerated (the UK’s largest LGBTQ+ charity, Stonewall, works with around 1,500 of the UK’s 32,770 schools); so too is the ease with which families can access medical treatment and the age at which these treatments are made available.” (p.37)

⁹² The conspiratorial argument that trans rights are the new “trojan horse” issue has also been made within the Muslim community, see Faisal Bodi, “Exposed and explained: The insidious agenda to foist LGBT on our children,” *Islamic Human Rights Commission*, March 29, 2019. A more useful, although still problematic, contribution from within the Muslim community on this issue which raises demands worthy of further discussion is provided in MEND’s April 2023 report: “Rights of the religious: why schools must consult with Muslim parents over LGBTQ content in schools.” This latter report begins by noting: “While it may be that the Conservatives are cynically weaponising this issue as part of their broader ‘culture war,’ it is also undeniable that genuine alarm exists among some sections of society regarding the direction of LGBTQ content in RSE, especially in primary

Now the same right-wing think tanks that churn out the bile that fuels and legitimates anti-Muslim sentiment, are producing the same type of reports to attack the trans community. A leading example in this regard is the Policy Exchange, and one writer associated with this think tank is Nick Timothy who regularly channels his versatile brand of divide-and-rule hate-speech for the *Daily Telegraph*. To take just two of Timothy's latest contributions, in July 2023 he pushed the damaging lie that "trans ideology" is "ruining young lives" with an article titled "Britain's passive surrender to a woke minority risks everything we cherish"; while in November he revived the nonsense about the "systematic sexual abuse of vulnerable white girls by gangs of mainly Muslim men" in an article that simultaneously smeared the protests against the war on Gaza as giving cover to hate-filled terrorist sympathisers. The title of the latter article was "British society will pay a terrible price for indulging extremism."

The So-called LGBTQ+ 'Plot' in British Schools

Elites' intent on dividing working-class communities of course have no qualms in attacking both Muslims and trans people, while also trying to mobilise both oppressed groups against one another. They do this by cynically weaponising liberal feminism and parts of the LGBTQ+ movement to demonise foreign Muslim countries in a blunt way to further their own violent foreign policy agendas;⁹³ while closer to

schools." Alternatively, for a Marxist response to the "No Outsiders" protests that took place in Birmingham in 2019, see Martin Powell-Davies, "Lessons in teaching equality," *Socialism Today*, November 11, 2019; and for an examination of ongoing legal challenges to RSE changes, see Paul Johnson and Silvia Falcetta "The inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity in Relationships Education: faith-based objections and the European Convention on Human Rights," *European Convention on Human Rights Law Review*, 2021.

⁹³ The political influence of the so-called international "LGBT lobby" or "Gay International" is always overstated for propaganda purposes, just as it was within Joseph Massad's 2002 book *Arab Sexualities* which receives a detailed rebuttal here. For a useful exposition on the dynamics of imperialist feminism, see Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (2021); and Sarah Schulman, *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*

home, they have provided prominent support and media coverage to conservative Muslims who have led protests against the promotion of LGBTQ+ rights in the education system.⁹⁴ The latter became a particularly hot national issue in 2019, when in the case of some of Birmingham's majority Muslim schools, Muslim parents (along with some conservative Christians) protested against the trans inclusionary educational policies in a handful of primary schools. But while it is true that there remains resistance amongst many conservative parents of all faiths in relation to LGBTQ+ matters, in this instance at least, it seems that the primary trigger for the Birmingham protests owed to the revelation that trans related education was being promoted as part of the governments PREVENT programme. As Dr. Rob Walker explains in his 2021 book *The Emergence of 'Extremism': Exposing the Violent Discourse and Language of 'Radicalization'*:

This conflict between integration and security agendas was made visible throughout 2019 by the reporting of protests by Muslim parents over the sex and relationships education that their children were offered in primary schools in Birmingham. The disagreement that led to the protests was portrayed in the press as an argument between the schools and the apparently traditionalist parents who were opposed to the 'No Outsiders' programme of lessons that introduced their children to LGBT+ relationships. In characteristically polarized responses, local Labour MP Roger Godsiff told protesters, 'I

(2012). And for a critical discussion of the weaponisation of the ideology of "human rights" more generally, see Paul O'Connell, "Human rights: contesting the displacement thesis," *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly*, 69(1), 2018.

⁹⁴ For useful critiques of conservative Muslim views on feminism and LGBTQ+ rights, see Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe's anthology *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature* (1997) As'ad AbuKhalil, "Gender boundaries and sexual categories in the Arab world," *Feminist Issues*, 15(1-2), 1997; Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (1992); Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman Rereading the Sacred Text From a Woman's Perspective* (1999); and Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (2002).

will continue to fight your corner because you're right', while his colleague and fellow local labour MP Jess Philips described the parents' actions as 'bigotry'.

What Philips failed to recognize and what was rarely mentioned in the press was that the initial protests were sparked when the head teacher of Parkfield Community School [in Saltley, Birmingham], Hazel Pulley, suggested that the lessons were being introduced 'in response to PREVENT' and to 'reduce radicalization' in the vilified parents' young children. In the same presentation that the head teacher introduced the No Outsiders lessons to the parents, she offered statistics on the number of their children who had been referred to PREVENT and then on to the counter-terrorism unit of the local police force. Though the parents were attacked in the press and by at least one of their local MPs, they were offered support for their opposition to their young children being cast as potential terrorists in a letter to the *Independent* newspaper that was signed by community groups, teachers and academics, including globally renowned feminist and queer ethicist Professor Judith Butler.⁹⁵

This important letter, which was published in September 2019, made clear the position of its advocates who stated:

We support the inclusion of LGBT+ identities within RSE [Relationships and Sex Education] at both primary- and secondary-school level. However, we reject the ways in which LGBT+ issues are being deployed in the Government's

⁹⁵ Walker, *The Emergence of 'Extremism'*, p.35. It is noteworthy that Roger Godsiff's Labour predecessor was Lynne Jones, a politician who served alongside Jeremy Corbyn in Labour's Socialist Campaign Group and was a key ally of the LGBTQ+ community during her time as the MP for Birmingham Selly Oak (1992-2010). When she retired in 2010, Jones refused to back Godsiff as her successor and instead did the right thing and supported the Respect candidate Salma Yaqoob. For more details about Jones' trans activism, see Christine Burns (ed.), *Trans Britain: Our Journey from the Shadows* (2018); and for an introduction to Yaqoob's political views, see her chapter "British Islamic political radicalism," in: Tahir Abbas (ed.), *Islamic Political Radicalism: A European Perspective* (2007).

discourse about the requirement to teach ‘Fundamental British Values’ as part of their ‘PREVENT’ counter-extremism and counterterrorism strategies.

This letter ended with a series of demands: one of which called for the immediate abolition of PREVENT; and another which demanded that the Department for Education “must offer clear guidance for the delivery of LGBT+ inclusive education in schools serving all our communities, produced in dialogue with LGBT+ groups, and including LGBT+ faith organisations.”⁹⁶ The government will of course do neither unless forced to do so.

⁹⁶ It should be emphasised that the “No Outsiders” curriculum was specifically “designed to teach ‘fundamental British values’” and was not designed to meet any LGBTQ+ related guidance. This point was made by John Holmwood who went on to add that the teaching of “fundamental British values in schools was “a requirement introduced in 2014, following the Birmingham Trojan Horse affair. It was part of the Government’s development of the PREVENT strategy to address ‘non-violent extremism’ and to include within it a safeguarding duty on schools (and other organisations like health providers, universities and colleges).” John Holmwood, “Ratcheting up the PREVENT agenda in schools,” *Discover Society*, November 4, 2020.

The assistant head who wrote the “No Outsiders” programme made the PREVENT connection explicit in his 2018 textbook which he used to accompany his programme which was published as *Reclaiming Radical Ideas in Schools: Preparing Young Children for Life in Modern Britain*. On the opening page of this book Moffatt frames his work as a means of understanding acts of terror. He writes: “How do we respond to an eight year old in 2017 questioning why a man killed twenty-three people at a concert in Manchester, or why another man killed five people on Westminster Bridge, drove a lorry into crowds in Nice or drove a van into a group of worshipers outside a mosque in London? Following the Charlie Hebdo massacre in 2015 a child asked me in a Year 5 assembly, ‘Why do the terrorists do this? Why do they kill people?’” Later on the same opening page he explains: “The PREVENT Duty states all schools must have ‘due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn in to terrorism’ (HM Gov, 2015, p.4)” He then adds that since writing “*No Outsiders in Our School: Teaching the Equality Act in Primary Schools* in 2015... the world has changed dramatically; in the last two years we have seen a rise in terrorist attacks across

Here it is significant to observe that while the “No Outsiders” lessons had been taught for some years, it was only in 2019 that it became a national controversy. A controversy that soon became enmeshed into the type of fearmongering promoted by Andrew Gilligan, an Islamophobic columnist who writes for *The Times*. The school protests had begun in January 2019, with various conservative Muslims subsequently getting involved – including Tahir Alam, who now reemerged as a concerned supporter of the parents. The protests subsequently received national media coverage for the best part of the year, with most reporters leaping on these events yet another opportunity to demonise Muslims. What was largely sidelined in all this Islamophobic reporting was the contributing role being played by the government. This is because the timing of the Birmingham protests coincided with the government’s ongoing efforts to introduce their new and controversial guidance for schools relating to the teaching of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). Thus, in June 2019, while Birmingham protests were still being organised, the Tory government’s new RSE guidance was published. Schools were now encouraged to think about updating their RSE curriculum, although it was only in September 2020 that these new government proposals became a statutory duty for all schools to follow. The new guidance from the Conservative Party...

...included a requirement in primary schools to teach about different families, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)... The statutory guidance also states that the religious background of pupils must be taken into consideration and that the core topics covered need to be ‘appropriately handled’: ‘Schools must ensure they comply with the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010, under which religion or belief are amongst the protected characteristics ... In particular, schools with a religious

Europe and the UK. In the original No Outsiders book I referenced radicalisation briefly; however since then I have been developing the resource with a specific aim to prevent young people from being drawn in to terrorism, rather than as a resource simply to promote equality and diversity.” (p.2)

character may teach the distinctive faith perspective on relationships' (DfE, 2019, p.12).⁹⁷

This summary of the guidance changes was made by Azita Zohhadi in Colin Diamond's edited collection on the Trojan Horse affair. Of particular relevance here is Zohhadi's own background, as between 2009 and 2020 the author had been a head teacher at Nelson Mandela Primary School in Sparkbrook, Birmingham – a school whose intake was 97 per cent Muslim. Zohhadi however remained adamant that the government must have known that its RSE guidance was never going to be easily implemented. She explained:

The language [in the guidance] anticipated discord. The statutory guidance was published following a period of consultation which suggested that it was generally welcome, with the exception of LGBT education in primary schools... Unfortunately, the flexibility given to schools at a local level resulted in some head teachers and schools being thrown into chaos and conflict almost overnight. [Even before the planned guidance became statutory a] couple of Birmingham schools, which had been proud of their positive relationships with their families, found themselves in a divided community and at the centre of a media frenzy.

Rumours and fake news fuelled anger and confusion. Some parents genuinely thought that schools were teaching children as young as 5 how to have gay sex. (p.157)

Similar criticisms of the now mandatory guidance were raised by Colin Diamond. He said the move was “always going to be controversial” as demonstrated by the negative views expressed in the earlier consultation which was undertaken by the government in late 2018. Diamond explained that “Socially conservative Christian, Jewish and Muslim parents made their opinions known” such that “40% of the responses were from people of faith. Overall, 58% of respondents

⁹⁷ Azita Zohhadi, “The pedagogy of equality,” in Diamond (ed.), *The Birmingham Book*, p.157.

disagreed with the content of relationships education in primary schools and there was considerable opposition to teaching about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) relationships.” Giving the benefit of the doubt to the powers that be – which in this case was uncalled for – Diamond mused that despite this opposition from religious conservatives, the “government seemed to think things would somehow sort themselves out”. He makes this generous point even though he also pointed out that the Department for Education had proven “unwilling to discuss [with education workers] how the guidance would play out in complex multi-faith, multi-ethnic schools and communities.”⁹⁸

The problematic role played by the government in rushing through these curriculum changes hardly ever featured in media reports on this matter. There were however rare exceptions. So, when the Birmingham protests outside Parkfield school and Anderton Park school made national news in 2019, the city council quickly brought in the former Chief Crown Prosecutor, Nazir Afzal, to help mediate at one of the schools. At the time Afzal correctly criticised those parents who were spreading misinformation, and he pointed out that: “The pain left over from the Trojan Horse allegations means there is a desire to seek payback. My message to those people is that I recognise the trust lost from the way those accusations were dealt with - but two wrongs don't make a right.” This element of lost trust may partly explain the angry nature of the protests, but most importantly Afzal reserved his harshest criticism for the political establishment. Afzal said:

The Government has been cowardly: they have failed to lead and own this issue (around equality teaching), leaving the burden unfairly on the shoulders of head teachers. It is disgraceful.

... Since 2010 it has been clear there is a tension between some of the characteristics protected under the Equality Act, particularly around religious beliefs and sexual orientation. It poses a conflict for some, but instead of addressing that conflict the Government has washed its hands, saying these

⁹⁸ Diamond, *The Birmingham Book*, p.273.

issues are to be dealt with locally, without clear guidelines. I have no doubt that this failure of clarity is political.

As recently as 2003, Section 28 was still in force, and no public schools could talk about LGBT issues positively. Across the country a sizeable chunk of the population follow faiths that do not believe in LGBT rights. The Government is in coalition with a political party, the DUP, that has made its views on LGBT very clear (the party opposes same sex marriage, for example). The Government's vagueness means that we could see protests like this spread to dozens of schools across the city and country. The only people who can stop this is the Government. They need to show leadership.⁹⁹

But mainstream politicians have no intention of showing political leadership to resolve this issue. Instead these same leaders remain determined to weaponise sexual politics as part of their highly politicised culture wars.¹⁰⁰

Likewise, it is not so surprising that conservatives from a variety of religious flavours are in the process of re-establishing strategic

⁹⁹ Jane Haynes, "'Cowardly Government' blamed for breakdown of Anderton Park protest peace talks," *Birmingham Mail*, May 30, 2019. For related criticisms, see Amy Gibbons, "'Change RSE policy or prejudices will take root,'" *TES Magazine*, October 9, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Socialist Alternative members in the National Education Union, "Culture war hits schools and colleges: defend trans students!," *Socialist Alternative*, December 20, 2023; Tom Costello, "Where the culture wars come from and how to fight them," *Socialist Alternative*, April 24, 2023. For a useful historical examination of how anti-LGBTQ+ activism has evolved in three countries (the UK, Canada, and Ireland), see Catherine Jean Nash and Kath Browne, *Heteroactivism: Resisting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Rights and Equalities* (2020). Vocal public involvement of Muslims in opposing the so-called "LGBT agenda" seems to have been given a kickstart by the pro-LGBTQ+ position of influential Scottish Muslim politician Humza Yousaf, see Rasha Al Aqeedi and Lydia Wilson "How Andrew Tate and the far right made common cause with Islamists," *New Lines Magazine*, June 20, 2023. Also of relevance is Anmol Irfan's article "Is Tate culture infiltrating religious conversations and spaces?," *GenderIT*, April 4, 2023.

alliances around their shared sexual conservatism and transphobia, especially when it comes to sex education in schools. And with the recent resurgence of far-right populist movements worldwide, new political coalitions (albeit highly contradictory and unstable ones) are now being formed between conservative Christians and Muslims, with right-wing Christian evangelists openly praising (and courting) Muslims for their defence of traditional family values. This convergence of backward-looking views also seems to have been further catalysed by other recent political controversies, most notably by Israel's genocidal onslaught on Gaza,¹⁰¹ and the influential vital misogyny that has been

¹⁰¹ The influential conservative Muslim media platform, *5Pillars*, continues to publish articles that celebrate the implementation of new laws that criminalise the LGBTQ+ community, for example in Ghana and Uganda. Since November 2023, *5Pillars* have undertaken a series of long interviews on their "Blood Brothers Podcast" with leading members of the far-right community. The podcasts interviewer, Dilly Hussain, appears to be using the interviews to demonstrate the main points of agreement between conservative Muslims and neo-Nazis concerning their opposition to the LGBTQ+ community, their promotion of traditional family families, and their hatred of the Israeli state (with Dilly opposing Zionism and the neo-Nazi's promoting anti-Semitism). Relevant interviews include ones undertaken with the former leader of the British Nationalist Party, Nick Griffin (on November 29, 2023), the head of Patriotic Alternative Mark Collett (on February 20, 2024), prominent far-right Christian preacher and the founder of Britain First, Jim Dowson (on January 9, 2024).

On February 29, 2024 Dilly published an open letter addressed to "British patriotic and white nationalists" wherein he made the case against the "ills of secular liberal capitalist individualism" and reached out to them to unite with Muslims against the "ruling elites" dividing British communities. This outreach remains a familiar theme for *5Pillars*, and on December 13, 2022, Dilly interviewed far-right mixed martial artist Jake Shields and asked him about his views on the "LGBT indoctrination agenda" and discussed how Christians can work with Muslims to oppose this agenda while also hinting at their joint opposition to the manipulative politics of the Israeli state. In 2020 Dilly published a post where he stated: "the guests who will never be hosted on the Blood Brothers Podcast (unless to be publicly challenged, shamed and exposed) are the open enemies of Islam and Muslims." But although it is true that he did ask a few challenging questions to his recent far-right guests, the interviews largely gave his guests an uncritical platform to spout their hate-

propounded by the likes of Andrew Tate who himself converted to become a Muslim in October 2022.¹⁰²

The Capitalist Roots of Oppression

In concluding this section, it must be emphasised that it has never been more important for all representatives of the working class or all faiths and none to come together in the battle to eliminate all oppression, whether that entails opposing Islamophobia, speaking out against misogynists like Andrew Tate, or by arguing against the reactionary ideas promoted by religious groups (of any faith) who seek to scapegoat members of the LGBTQ+ community for all the worlds ills.

speech.

When it comes to criticising the LGBTQ+ issue in the context of the education system *5Pillars* defer to the knowledge of a former leading Hizb ut-Tahrir member Yusuf Patel. In 2008 Patel formed SREIslamic and was interviewed on Dilly's podcast in April 2022. Patel asserted that the entire issue relating to trans issues in schools started about is "very new" and started about "five or six years" ago. He added "in America, where all of it started, people have pointed to what they call peer contagion" (at 17min).

¹⁰² One of the most visible leaders of the Birmingham school protests of 2019 was Shakeel Afsar, a young property developer who was the uncle of a child at Anderton Park school. Other than his involvement in the critical issue of fighting for the liberation of Kashmir, Afsar's prior involvement in day-to-day politics seems minimal. In a recent interview he recounted how "in my university days I was a seven-day raver" (54min); but now he considers himself a strong upholder of traditional family values, and later in the same interview repeatedly referred to the influence that Andrew Tate had on him about the need for men to be real men (Interview, February 5, 2023). Interestingly, Afsar's campaigning at the forefront of the 2019 protests brought him into making a strange and controversial strategic alliance with the rampant far-right Islamophobe, Katie Hopkins, who met with him in Birmingham at the height of the protests. Of course, his views on others issues remained vastly different from those of Hopkins, and at the time Afsar, along with his father, was leading the locally based Kashmiri Liberation Organisation. For a useful discussion of Tate's expanding influence, see Rasha Al Aqeedi, "Andrew Tate and the moral bankruptcy of Muslim proselytization," *New Lines Magazine*, January 26, 2023.

If we are serious about addressing the world's many problems, we must look behind the corporate-backed lies and propaganda. And here we should reserve our most scathing criticisms for the capitalist institutions that actively contribute towards creating a climate which enables such nonsense to flourish in the first place. This means that powerful agenda-setting institutions like the mainstream media must be held to account, as there can be no doubting that they continue to impose the ruling-classes' own distorted and disempowering version of reality upon the world.¹⁰³

Is it really any wonder that devoid of a mainstream media that reflects their reality, millions of ordinary people have turned to conspiracy theories steeped in Islamophobia (and transphobia) to help them understand their lives? But we should understand that the deeper causes for the popularity of such rubbish ultimately derives from the class nature of society. This is why, for all those who are truly interested in promoting a democratic and socialist society for all, it is essential that class issues are tackled head-on. It is the ruling class who profit from the continuing public confusion. And it is this billionaire-class and their allies in the corporate media who are quite happy to engage in lies and diversionary tactics to prevent the rest of us from focusing on the single most important issue that holds back all our lives... capitalism.

¹⁰³ The corporate media's anti-democratic ambition is achieved in a variety of ways: for a start, such media outlets are nothing but consistent in their attacks upon popular movements and in opposing any trade unionists who attempt to unite the working-class against their capitalist oppressors. For several useful examinations of this subject, see Glasgow University Media Group, *Bad News* (1976); Christopher Martin, *Framed!: Labor and the Corporate Media* (2003); and Owen Jones, *Chavs: The Demonisation of the Working Class* (2011).

THREE

Relentless Demonisation

The Challenge to Labour and Tory Extremism

- July 22, 2015

Extremism is on the rise, let there be no doubt. Apparently socialism is viewed by some as part of this growing problem, with Tony Blair stating earlier this morning that “radical leftism... is often in fact quite reactionary”. He warned, “let me make my position clear: I wouldn’t want to win on an old fashioned leftist platform. Even if I thought it was the route to victory, I wouldn’t take it.” This bizarre position helps to explain why Liz Kendall is Mr Blair’s favoured leadership candidate for the Labour Party – a women who openly supports the intensification of austerity, argues that the Labour Party should not have voted in Parliament to recognise the Palestinian state, and believes that the democratically-elected Government of the Greek working-class are “extremists.”¹

On Monday evening the majority of the Labour Party reaffirmed their abdication of the 76% of the electorate, who most

¹ Jon Stone, “Labour should not have voted to recognise Palestine, says leadership candidate Liz Kendall,” *Independent*, July 21, 2015.

certainly did not vote for the Tories, by refusing to challenge the Government's extremist Welfare Bill. This not unexpected failure took place on the same day that David Cameron delivered a speech in Birmingham about the Tories plan to eradicate Islamist extremism. A speech that went a long way to illustrating the similarities between the Tories anti-worker, pro-corporate approach to politics, and Blair and Kendall's own stupefying misconceptions about extremism.

In his transparently faux bid to tackle the root causes of such problems Cameron explained, "what I call the grievance justification [for extremism], must be challenged." Apparently, we should not be fooled into thinking that "historic injustices and recent wars, or... poverty and hardship" contribute in a significant way to the growth of extremism. Echoing the misdirections of the Government's much maligned PREVENT strategy, Cameron said "we must be clear" that decades of war and needless slaughter in the Middle East have no bearing on the matter: "The root cause of the threat we face is the extremist ideology itself."

In defence of his newly minted PREVENT strategy for schools, Cameron says that it "is paranoia in the extreme" to believe that PREVENT is really "about criminalising or spying on Muslim children." But evidently such paranoid extremist beliefs are widespread, as demonstrated by an open letter published in *The Independent* (July 10) that condemned PREVENT in the sharpest terms – in ways that Cameron might term "paranoia in the extreme".² Supported by hundreds of people, the letter was signed by the likes of Labour peer Baroness Ruth Lister (who is based at Loughborough University) and religious historian Karen Armstrong, who just last month was awarded an OBE for her services to literature and interfaith dialogue.

Not put off by such criticisms, Cameron warned that "wild conspiracy theories" must be condemned, whether based in fact or otherwise. Historical facts merely seem to confuse matters for Cameron. But it is precisely the type of extreme paranoia promoted by non-violent extremists (like those who signed the aforementioned

² "PREVENT will have a chilling effect on open debate, free speech and political dissent," *Independent*, July 2010, 2015.

open letter) that Cameron wishes to criminalise. It “is clear” he warns, that many Islamic terrorists “were first influenced by what some would call non-violent extremists.” Hence a “key part” of the government’s anti-terror strategy “means confronting groups and organisations that may not advocate violence – but which do promote other parts of the extremist narrative.”

Poisonous ideologies “have existed before – whether fascist or communist” Cameron reminds us, thereby conveniently lumping communism – a democratic ideology (when not in Stalinist garb) that is committed to social justice and the promotion of egalitarian social and economic relations – alongside fascism. The latter ideology of fascism of course having much in common with Cameron’s own toxic and individualist brands of corporatist ideology (neoconservatism and neoliberalism).

Fortunately, two representatives from the Leicestershire Federation of Muslim Organisations had ringside seats at the Prime Minister’s speech (these being Abdul Kareem Gheewala and Suleman Nagdi). Moreover just last month Mr Nagdi published a letter in *The Guardian* newspaper (June 1) criticising Britain’s most senior Muslim police chief for “promoting hysteria which can cause the marginalisation of individuals, which can cause its own problems.”³ So given Mr Nagdi’s previous role as the Leicester lead for the PREVENT strategy, I will look forward to hearing his criticisms of Cameron’s dangerous and anti-democratic speech. Perhaps Mr Nagdi might even consider writing a first-person piece in the *Leicester Mercury* on this subject?

³ “This is not the way to fight extremism,” *Guardian*, June 1, 2015.

How the PREVENT Programme Targets Muslims in the Midlands

- July 25, 2015

The government has long described its Preventing Violent Extremism programme (hereafter 'PREVENT') as "a community-led approach to tackling violent extremism". But all is not as the Government would have us believe. This is why Arun Kundnani's comprehensive 2009 report *Spooked: How Not to Prevent Violent Extremism* has proven itself so useful.¹ Far from downplaying the threat of terrorism, the author of this report (and its funder, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust) were clear that the *Spooked* study was undertaken to help "apply democratic and human rights standards to counter-terrorism programmes". It is with this in mind that we should consider the report's conclusions:

What we found was that there are strong reasons for thinking that the PREVENT programme, in effect, constructs the Muslim population as a 'suspect community', fosters social divisions among Muslims themselves and between Muslims and others, encourages tokenism, facilitates violations of privacy and professional norms of confidentiality, discourages local democracy and is counter-productive in reducing the risk of political violence. Moreover, there is evidence that the PREVENT programme has been used to establish one of the most elaborate systems of surveillance ever seen in Britain.

This decidedly worrying conclusion was the result of Arun Kundnani's six-month research project, which drew upon existing policy and academic work, freedom of information requests, a programme of interviews and a roundtable discussion. In total thirty-two interviews were conducted with PREVENT programme workers and managers in local authorities, members of local PREVENT boards, voluntary sector workers engaged in PREVENT work and community workers familiar with local PREVENT work. Hence the study serves to provide much useful information about the history of PREVENT that

¹ Arun Kundnani, "Spooked: How not to prevent violent extremism," *Institute of Race Relations*, October 2009.

should help us view PREVENT's ongoing roll-out within our communities and schools.

Although I would recommend that all local community workers and teachers read the full *Spooked* report, which can be found online, in this short article I simply wish to give a flavour of some of the ideas revealed by anonymous interviewees based more locally. For a start, it is troublesome that many interviewees were unclear as to who had access to the data they collected in their PREVENT work. A person involved with PREVENT in the Midlands said:

Depending on who you ask, there are different answers to the question of information sharing. I think there is a serious issue around data gathering on participants. Young people won't be aware of what is being collected on them - there isn't any accountability. Even organisations don't know how data will be used. This is a common concern among potential participants.

Moreover while the Government likes to say that PREVENT is about tackling all forms of extremism, this is not how people involved with its implementation view it. One community activist explained how other people were saying: "Look the money only goes to Muslims." Indeed, it seems that as a direct result of focusing significant resources on Muslim's one consequence has been the creation of animosity across other groups. Another community activist from the region said:

Other communities - Hindus, Sikhs, the Black community - are upset that Muslims are getting all this money, even if Muslims themselves don't want to be put in this situation or be labelled. I have had councillors from other communities saying it is unfair. So, in this way, PREVENT reinforces negative attitudes. It does not help to bring about good relations or community cohesion.

Yet another voluntary sector worker in the Midlands pointed out:

People feel that PREVENT is aimed only at the Muslim community and is labelling them. If you look at the government's guidance, you will see there is just a cursory

paragraph which talks about preventing all forms of extremism. This is all very well but, in real life, money is only going to the Muslim community. That is not right. The money should tackle all forms of extremism, like the BNP for instance.

But despite these apparent problems, local Muslim groups often felt forced into accepting funding from the PREVENT programme. This no doubt is a problem that has intensified in recent years, with total local authority funding for all local service provision having been slashed by 40% since 2010. Tragically as one manager of a voluntary sector organisation in the Midlands put it:

We had no option but to apply for PREVENT funding because of other sources drying up, leaving us in a poor financial situation. But lots of people won't touch this money with a bargepole. People in the Muslim community have held press conferences saying that the money should go back to the government.

Extremists and Public Enemies

- August 11, 2015

If Liz Kendall wins the Labour leadership contest she says her victory anthem will be Public Enemy's 'Get up, stand up'. This song was inspired by historic leaders of popular struggle like Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X (who at the time were demonised by the mainstream media as so-called Muslim extremists). "Most of my heroes still don't appear on no stamp" goes the song. Yes indeed: Kendall's own mentor Tony Blair was excluded from the Royal Mail's recent batch of stamps celebrating British Prime Ministers.

But can Kendall spare some time and effort to help H. Rap Brown, one of the activist leaders mentioned by Public Enemy, who for the past fifteen years has been unjustly incarcerated in America? Rap Brown played a heroic role in the fight for civil rights during the 1960s, later converting to orthodox Islam, adopting the name Jamil al-Amin. He then became an imam and led a life committed to

promoting social justice more in line with his spiritual beliefs than his previous experience in revolutionary politics. Yet unjustified police harassment doggedly followed Al-Amin.

In 2000, Al-Amin was arrested on murder charges, and found guilty of shooting and killing a police officer. To this day he languishes in the “domestic Guantanamo” prison in Florence, Colorado, despite the fact that another person confessed to the crime, and the evidence filed against him was shoddy to say the least. Tragically, in 2009, Luqman Abdullah, who had led the fight for Al-Amin’s release was killed by the FBI. The full story of injustice is recounted by Arun Kundnani in his 2014 book *The Muslims Are Coming!: Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror*. As Kundnani concludes, “there is little doubt that had the government chosen not to infiltrate [Luqman Abdullah’s] mosque and entrap him in a criminal conspiracy of its own invention, he would still be alive.” (p.5)

Kendall professes that “the freedom to worship in different places” is “worth defending with everything we have” (July 7, *Leicester Mercury*). So will Kendall “Get Up *and* Stand Up” for Al-Amin, and take a firm stand against the American, and our own Government’s, escalating attacks upon Muslim’s through their regressive and counterproductive anti-terror legislation? It seems not. For Kendall, Public Enemy’s powerful militant raps and melodies are just for dancing, not for listening to. Instead, with little regard for logic or equality, Kendall adds fuel to the Islamophobic frenzy gripping the political establishment, calling for a “battle of necessity” “against Islamist extremism” (July 7, *Mercury*).

Opposing Government-Fuelled Islamophobia

- August 19, 2015

It is always nice to hear about groups that are organising to promote global peace, so I was happy to read more about upcoming convention of Britain's Ahmadiyya Muslim community (First-Person, August 19, *Leicester Mercury*).

Islamophobia remains a major problem in British society. But unfortunately not much seems to have changed since 2011 when Dr Habib Akram (a leader of the local Ahmadi community) published a First-Person piece in the *Mercury* (April 29) which highlighted the negative role played by the mainstream media. "No good, it seems - if the media were to be believed - ever comes from Muslims," he wrote. Dr Akram correctly drew attention to the relationship between the ongoing demonisation of Muslims and the historic persecution of communists, which of course included many leading trade unionists: "Decades ago, it was not Islam that was the menace (it was then an ally) when communism was the great threat and the West feared the 'reds under beds'."

Like many other Muslim groups, it is not easy to be openly critical of the government's Islamophobic 'Preventing Violent Extremism' strategy, which allegedly aims to undermine home-grown terrorism. But at least the international press office of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community felt comfortable enough to provide some friendly criticisms of David Cameron's July 2015 speech about his efforts to stamp out Islamic extremism. The Ahmadi press office statement noted how, despite their own high expectations, Cameron's speech "sadly... often veered into reaffirming generalised views of Islam, which are not only unhelpful, but counter-productive."⁵ They went on, Cameron's "gratuitous claim that a link must be drawn between Islam and extremism lacks understanding and so masks a more sinister suggestion that there is some theological justification for extremist acts within the religion of Islam." Correctly adding that such misrepresentations only serve to "add fuel to the fire" of Islamophobia. The statement also pointed out how the "prime

⁵ "Blog on David Cameron's extremism speech," *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community*, August 6, 2015.

minister is either unwilling or unable to come to terms with the proven links between political unrest and global frustration”.

Nevertheless, the Ahmadi communities’ gentle criticisms of Cameron don’t go anywhere near far enough. After-all, they make no mention of the disturbing way in which Cameron conflated what he called nonviolent and violent Islamic extremism. Furthermore, compared to the extensively documented criticisms of Cameron’s anti-terrorism strategy undertaken by the likes of Professor Arun Kundnani, the Ahmadiyya Muslim communities’ response to Cameron’s belligerent nonsense is decidedly timid. But then again, one must remember that any Muslim group openly contradicting the government’s reactionary views on countering terrorism run the very serious risk of being mislabelled by Tories as Islamic extremists themselves!

Iain Duncan Smith’s Legacy of Extremism

- August 31, 2015

Understanding the causes of racist extremism is important. So it is nice that the government’s PREVENT strategy, whose remit is usually limited to monitoring and demonising Muslims, is appointing its first ever employee to examine the foundations of right-wing racism. Leicestershire’s PREVENT co-ordinator explained: “There is a lot of fog around the far right...” (August 25, *Leicester Mercury*). There certainly is, and none more so than around the worrying undertakings of Tory extremists like Iain Duncan Smith.

An early warning of IDS’s extremism came in 1992, when Norman Tebbit relinquished his parliamentary seat in Chingford to IDS he famously stated: “If you think I’m rightwing, wait until you meet this guy.” This from a man who was a long-time participant in the notorious Monday Club, a group renowned for its vehement racism. In 1995 IDS courted the far-right when he met senior figures in the French Front Nationale “and later drank with them in a bar at Westminster” to discuss their shared opposition to the European

Union.⁶ Ominously, this meeting had been set-up by the ultra right-wing Western Goals Institute.

IDS then took his radical anti-EU activism forward as a vice president of the hard-right Conservatives Against a Federal Europe, where he served alongside fellow MPs and vice presidents like John Bercow, Andrew Hunter, and Sir Richard Body. Hunter, like many Tories, is a hardened racist and a 1995 report carried in *The Observer* demonstrated that he had worked for the Apartheid South African intelligence services, in work closely allied to that being undertaken by Western Goals. Laying aside the Labour Party's own contribution to extremism (an illegal war on Iraq); in late 2000 foreign secretary, Robin Cook, accused William Hague of failing to stand up to extremism, especially his refusal to close down the far-right publication *Right Now* and for appointing Monday Club darling John Bercow to his frontbench.⁷

During IDS's successful bid for the Tory leadership in the summer of 2001, controversy around extremism struck again, which led to the sacking of a local vice chair of his leadership campaign for manning a BNP helpline.⁸ The individual in question was Edgar Griffin, the father of the privately educated BNP leader Nick Griffin, and husband to BNP employee Jean Griffin – a woman who just a few months earlier had stood against IDS for his seat in Chingford.

In spite of such fresh charges of racism, none of this stopped IDS from accepting enthusiastic campaign support from the deputy chairman of the Monday Club, Andrew Hunter. "They are a viable group within the party and they are, in a sense, what that party is all about," IDS told *The Telegraph* on September 2, 2001.⁹ By October however IDS had been forced into making an about-face, in order to

⁶ "Newsmight: Iain Duncan Smith," *BBC*, July 25, 2002; Antony Barnett and Paul Harris, "Tory leader's trail of links to global extreme Right," *Guardian*, April 28, 2002.

⁷ Patrick Wintour, "Hague exploits fear, warns Cook," *Guardian*, September 11, 2000.

⁸ Nicholas Watt, "Tories cut Monday Club link over race policies," *Guardian*, October 19, 2001.

⁹ Andrew Sparrow, "Duncan Smith orders Monday Club to suspend Tory links," *Daily Telegraph*, October 19, 2001.

rebrand the Tories as the less-nasty party, suspending the Monday Club from the Conservative party – apparently because of its decades long promotion of inflammatory views on race. One of the three MPs forced to resign from the club (but not from parliament) was Andrew Hunter, who also dropped his position as a patron of *Right Now* – a magazine being edited by the former leader of a Nazi party in Ireland.

Of course, many Monday Club acolytes remained safely ensconced within Tory circles, like Sir Richard Body, who in April 2001 courted infamy by publishing his racist book *England for the English*. Shortly thereafter, Body stood down as a Tory MP having served in parliament for the best part of 35 years. He is now a proud member of the racist English Democrats and chairman of a right-wing journal edited by Derek Turner, called *The Quarterly Review*. Fittingly *The Quarterly Review* is based at the same house in Sudbury as Bloomfield Books, one of Britain’s most extremist anti-Semitic publishing houses. One can only conclude from this brief overview of extremism that a good starting point for the PREVENT strategy’s fresh focus on the far right would be to root out and expose its leading proponents within parliament.

The Real Preachers of Hate

- November 24, 2015

Stories concerning “preachers of hate” abound in the media, and it would be hard not to notice how a disproportionate number of these articles feature Muslims. I am, of course, referring to those journalists who continue to preach hatred against Muslims, paying scant regard to the truth.

Rupert Murdoch’s so-called newspaper, *The Sun*, is currently vying for the top position as a purveyor of lies and interreligious hatred. Nothing new here. On Monday *The Sun* led with a headline dedicated to inciting racial unrest: “1 in 5 Brit Muslims’ Sympathy for Jihadis”. This blatant untruth led local teacher Riaz Khan to post an excellent video rebuttal to Murdoch’s head-li(n)e, which soon went viral reaching nearly 1 million downloads (November 25, *Leicester*

Mercury). Mr Khan correctly explained how “attacks against Muslims will increase” because of Murdoch’s latest attack-piece, which will serve to further isolate Muslims, and in the long-run actually encourage support for extreme points of view.

A recent letter published in the *Mercury* (November 20) succinctly summed up the problem: “only the wealthy and powerful are free to live as they wish, and almost always at the expense of... the masses.” This couldn’t describe Murdoch and his divisive and deceitful global media empire any better. Murdoch’s commitment to supporting illegal wars in the Middle East, scapegoating minorities at home, and promoting the privatisation and destruction of British public services, is sadly well-known. In 2010, in honour of Margaret Thatcher, he gave a speech urging the coalition government to press ahead with deep cuts in public spending. But these cuts are not necessary at all, as has been pointed out by the new leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn. Hence the ongoing character assassination of Corbyn being waged by Murdoch and co in the elitist world of the corporate media.

Murdoch and his press baron friends’ disinformation campaign is simple and immensely repetitive: studiously ignore the insane transfer of wealth from the 99% to the 1%; support attacks on all workers’ pay and conditions; promote the slashing of vital public services; massively underfund schools and housebuilding programs; do everything possible to enable the rich to profit from privatisation; and then, finally, blame all of the aforementioned problems on immigrants, and/or Muslim terrorists.

As a Muslim in one of the poorest cities in Britain, Mr Khan is well-placed to understand the tragic social consequences of this relentless propaganda offensive against the public. All the more so, because, as an English and foreign language teacher at Leicester College, Mr Khan has first-hand experience of the Tories’ decimation of post-16 education. As Kate Drew, chair of the University and College Union at Leicester College, recently said following a well-attended protest against education cuts: “Cuts to education have been dramatic. We’ve already lost large amounts of staff and there have now been huge cuts to ESOL funding too. It’s time to say enough is enough” (October 15, *Mercury*).

Is the CIA Peaceful?

- December 22, 2015

Islam has as little to do with terrorism as the Ku Klux Klan has to do with Christianity. But this simple truism has not prevented Michael Myers' self-proclaimed "confusion" ("Is Islam peaceful?," *Leicester Mercury Mailbox*, December 22), which led him to impute evil machinations to the religion of Islam: all because of Michael's acceptance of a literal definition of Jihad, based on two sentences from the Qur'an.

By contrast, Professor Bernard Lewis, an arch-conservative advisor to all manner of American warmongers, provides a far more reasonable summation of the religious-terrorist nexus in his influential book, *Islam: The Religion and the People*. The learned professor is explicit that the terrorist practice of suicide bombing "has no antecedents in Islamic history, and no justification in terms of Islamic theology, law, or tradition." Writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, he further makes plain that "the laws of Jihad categorically preclude wanton and indiscriminate slaughter."

Muslims like Christians are united in their condemnation of terrorism: and, as most would surely agree, it is political not religious ideas that lead to terrorism. Religious fanatics who partake in terrorism in the name of their religion nearly always exhibit a very poor understanding of their religious scriptures, be they the Bible or the Qur'an. Powerful elite interests, however, are not so naïve, and in the case of Islam, have benefited immensely from encouraging the spread of literal and extremist misinterpretations of this religion to serve their own political interests in the Middle East.

During the 1980s for instance, the CIA was able to construct a 50,000-strong mercenary army (Mujahideen), using Saudi Arabia and Pakistan as proxies, to fight the Russians. Billions of US dollars flowed into the region, matched only by donations from rich Saudi tycoons and our then ally in the conflict, Osama bin Laden. Here, a central political player in enabling the well-funded growth of a radical Islamic ideology in Afghanistan was Pakistan's military regime - led by the infamous and reactionary General Zia-ul-Haq. Tragically in 1977 this brutal General had, with the blessings of US imperialism and support

of other Western-funded religious parties like Jamati Islami, acted to overthrow the elected government of the Pakistan People's Party and immediately impose martial law. Religious extremism serves the political interests of a powerful few against the urgent social and economic needs of the many.

Hate-Letters

- January 24, 2016

Jeremy Corbyn has made it clear that “the so-called Islamic State has imposed a reign of sectarian and inhuman terror in Iraq, Syria and Libya.” He has also emphasised how “ISIL grew out of the invasion of Iraq”. Regular *Leicester Mercury* letter writer, Karen Shepherd, is therefore seriously at odds with reality when she frets about Corbyn being a “sympathiser of Islamic State” (January 20). She seems blissfully unaware that just a few months ago the majority of the current government's own expert advisors explained that the bombing of Syria would only serve to fuel the rise of ISIS. This of course did not stop the Tories and 66 rebel Labour MPs from voting for bombing.

And while Karen supports the bombing, she has previously expressed her contempt for Leicester protesters “whose campaign message was Stop The War” (December 14). She deemed such democratic attempts to influence our government as misplaced; instead she “wondered if these people (along with Mr Jeremy Corbyn) would consider taking their protest to Syria and Iraq as well as this country.” Yet Karen's intolerance extends to the “stupid” Tories as well. So when David Cameron held a debate in Parliament (in 2013) on whether to allow same sex-marriages, she felt compelled to write: “Well, Mr Cameron, as far as I am concerned you and the rest of your loonies really have lost the plot on how to run this country.”

Not content to merely criticise from the sidelines, Karen has her own suggestions for government action, like banning hoods and making it illegal to cover one's face up in public (2011). She has also called for the “banning of the burka in public” to minimise the threat posed by terrorists (2013) - terrorists, who she unhelpfully explains, are “probably masquerading as immigrants” (2015). But when it

comes to other matters that are close to her own heart, Karen is insistent that banning things just doesn't work: it "is simply Big Brother yet again interfering in people's lives". In this instance she was referring to "plans to stop people smoking in public places".

Bans are acceptable to Karen as long as they target people she doesn't like. Thus as a self-described "devout Christian" Karen unfortunately views Muslim's as being synonymous with terrorists. "How can Christians be expected to tolerate Muslim religion" she wrote after taking offence at one banner on a stall in Leicester "stating that Jesus is a Muslim." Evidently tolerance is not something that Karen sanctifies in her own personal and distorted version of Christian morality. As in another letter she suggests that instead of testing chemicals on animals, a "better solution" would be to use prisoners.

"This country's prisons are overcrowded, so why not use some of the prisoners," Karen points out, in an eerie, unwitting echo of a well-known Nazi policy. Little wonder that in 2012, Karen's delicate, albeit ahistorical, sensibilities were deeply offended by chants of "Nazi scum off our streets" that were directed against the English Defence League when they marched through Leicester. As she wrote at the time, such counter-protesters "were worse than the EDL for making comments like that."

The Tory Terrorist Threat

- January 30, 2016

Sir Gerald Howarth has been a Tory MP on and off since 1983. He is a proud extremist, and his elitist political views have always proven to be off the scale compared to those held by ordinary people. Shortly after becoming a fully-fledged adult, Gerald managed to exceed himself by campaigning in defence of the Vietnam war, and by helping run an organisation committed to "freedom" that has been described in Parliament as being "almost certainly a British intelligence front organization which is mainly used for disseminating Establishment-type propaganda." His activism during the early 1970s also saw Gerald making friends and influencing people in the immigration sub-

committee of the notorious Conservative Monday Club. In the course of this activism, he and his chums sought to encourage their right-wing national membership (which included 34 MPs) to branch out and start working more effectively with groups such as the National Front on such issues as opposing “coloured immigration” and promotion of “proper repatriation”. Such nasty, extremist work, was later bolstered by Gerald’s strong defence of apartheid in South Africa, combined with a vehement hatred of anti-apartheid activists.

Moving to the present day, in addition to being a raging Islamophobe, Gerald is proud of his government’s beefing up of the UK’s counter-extremism strategy (PREVENT) – a program which he admitted (approvingly) is really a counter-Islamic strategy.¹⁰ The government of course allege that their counter-extremism strategy is only concerned with fighting terrorism. But the same government steadfastly refuse to consider any economic and political factors that might have fuelled the rise of such terrorism in the first place: think Iraq for instance, or their long-standing supporting of right-wing militant Muslims. On the other hand, the government have shown their gritted determination to dangerously expand the definition of terrorism to expunge any mention of violence or even a threat of violence. Thankfully their latest authoritarian turn in this regard has just been overturned by a UK court of appeal.

However, it bears considering that the Tories hoped to have terrorism redefined as activities that are “designed to influence a government and is made for the purpose of promoting a political or ideological cause.”¹¹ Which can mean pretty much anything! Under this definition, even peaceful anti-apartheid activists would have been considered part of the terrorist threat to “our” national security. By this logic, would we also consider the thousands of people that refused to pay the poll tax in the 1990s terrorists?

¹⁰ “Out-of-school Education Settings,” Houses of Parliament, January 20, 2016.

¹¹ Trevor Timm, “Journalism is not terrorism. Criticism of the government is not violence,” *Guardian*, January 19, 2016.

Islamophobia, the EU, and the Real Preachers of Hate – Britain First

- May 22, 2016

Britain First, a toxic split-off group from the British National Party, were unsuccessful in launching their EU campaign here in Leicester yesterday. Members of the public stood their ground in challenging Britain First's anti-immigrant propaganda and their ill-informed hatred of Muslims, and so the police had to step in to better enable them to continue distributing their hate-filled paraphernalia. Soon an ever-growing crowd encircled the preachers of hate, which left the shaven thugs with not much to do except stand waving their huge union jack flags, until the angry crowd grew to such a size that they were escorted back to their car by the police.

Clearly a central pillar of far-right groups like Britain First is their ability to confuse themselves. Picking up and amplifying the misleading narrative that runs through much of the right-wing national press, and even the liberal media, such divisive groups blame all the world's problems on immigrants. Needless to say they neglect to focus on the real causes of Britain's problems, which is the fact that, over the past four decades or so, successive governments have served to enrich the 0.1% elite at the expense of the rest of us.

Let's remember that the main rate of corporation tax in the UK was 52% in 1980, and is now just 18%. This is not to mention the criminal amount of tax avoidance that is openly carried out right under the noses of our government, which has meant that around £120 billion a year is stolen from the British working class. Here it is important to note that while Jeremy Corbyn, as the new leader of the Labour Party, may oppose such systemic corporate cronyism, almost the entirety of the parliamentary leadership of the Labour Party still prefers to actively serve the needs of the corporate business class before those of the working class. A perfect example is provided by the newly elected Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who during his election campaign vowed to be "the most pro-business Mayor London has ever had", and who, since being elected, aggressively attacked

Corbyn for his commitment to socialist ideas.¹² Facts like these of course matter little to Britain First. Sadiq Khan is a “dangerous Islamic extremist,” they say in a video describing how London “has fallen” to the Muslims, adding that Khan was “pushed to the forefront by the new Left-wing extremist fringe that has taken over the Labour Party.” Simple obvious truths elude Britain First once again!

It is little surprise that Britain First’s so-called anti-EU campaign is equally nonsensical. They say they are defiantly campaigning against “a leftwing EU superstate” and they warn “Every leftist and liberal is crawling out from under every rock to ruin our chances of making our country great again.” They neglect to mention that socialists have a long track-record of opposing the bosses club that is the EU; indeed, Jeremy Corbyn himself has spent his whole working life opposing the EU precisely because it serves the interest of the super-rich and enforces austerity upon Europe. The irony is that now Corbyn has become the leader of the Labour Party his right-wing colleagues in Parliament have been able to force him to campaign to stay in the EU.

Why We Need Mass Protests to Force the Far-Right Off Our Streets

- May 23, 2016

Far-rightwing Christian patriots Britain First are on a mission to cleanse Britain’s streets of Muslims. One of their stated policies is to “Offer generous grants to those of foreign descent resident here who wish to leave permanently”. In the meantime, in order to help encourage foreign people to leave Britain, they spread lies about Muslims – spewing forth even worse bile than that which is viciously propagated in the mainstream media (on an almost daily basis). Former BNP publicist turned Britain First frontman, Paul Golding, claims not to be racist, but has nevertheless stated that “Britain First will not rest until Islam has been driven from our shores!” Speaking in recent documentary he confirms, “It will end in bloodshed. It will

¹² Thomas Barker, “The London Mayoral election: a victory for whom?,” *CounterPunch*, May 13, 2016.

end in civil war in this country.”¹³ Ever the consummate professional, Paul prefers not to Sieg Heil in public, he leaves that to his misled fanboys.

Britain First profess to be “a movement of British nationalism, patriotism and democracy” while, at the same time, they are adamant that they stand “opposed to all alien and destructive political or religious doctrines”, including Liberalism. Of course Britain First also have a conspiratorial aversion to Marxism too. However, as a Marxist and member of the Socialist Party in Leicester, despite my dislike of everything that Britain First stands for, I believe that the most effective way of opposing such opportunistic far-right groups is by posing a meaningful political alternative to the poverty of mainstream politics. It is for such reasons that I stood in last year’s elections for the firmly anti-austerity, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

Calling for the outright banning of right-wing groups from our streets, as some do, is totally counterproductive; but we certainly do not need to let them have free reign of our city, as Sir Peter Soulsby did in 2012, when he let the EDL march right through the centre of town. Instead the best way of fighting the far-right is by mobilising mass opposition on our streets, just as we did on Saturday afternoon in Leicester. Nevertheless some people disagree with such tactics. Earlier today for example, Stuart Young, UKIP’s recent parliamentary candidate for Leicester West explained:

I am going to speak plainly here. I don’t like the Britain First party. Their big state and religious racist views are the complete opposite of what I stand for. That said, the lot who decided they had the moral high ground to shout them down and abuse them are just as bad. Actually, no. They are worse. Anti-fascist groups? Don’t make me laugh. They are some of the most fascist people I have ever had the misfortune to meet. (Web site comment, May 23, *Leicester Mercury*)

Taking an alternative political position on the same *Leicester Mercury* report (“Mayor Peter Soulsby praises ‘good people of Leicester’ who

¹³ Laurence Maples, “‘Britain First’ – tiny and violent,” *The Socialist*, October 21, 2015.

challenged Britain First activists”), Gush Bhumbra, the President of the Leicester Secular Society made the following misguided post on Facebook:

While it is great that the people of Leicester show that we don't want racism spread here, we cannot have people being stopped from peacefully proclaiming patriotic ideas and protesting against immigration. Free speech is way too important to be curtailed by the threat of violence. I don't know the details but if it is true that the police had to escort them because of threats to their safety, it is a sad day for free speech here in Leicester.

To this confused response I wrote:

Do you know who Britain First are? They drive round in military convoys and call themselves a 'street defence organisation'. You seem to impute violence to the people of Leicester who were adamantly opposed to racism on our streets. As you admit you clearly 'don't know the details' so don't cry and say 'it is a sad day for free speech here in Leicester.' When thousands of people march through the streets and get angry about the Tories holding their conferences in our cities - with massive police protection I might add - do you similarly weep for the demise of democracy and say 'it is a sad day for free speech'?

Britain First's War on Islam

- May 31, 2016

Britain First is a tiny organisation with a massive social media outreach, led by Paul Golding, the former publicist for the neo-nazi group, the BNP. Unfortunately, Mr Golding believes he has been given an important mission by God to do his utmost to spread right-wing 'Christian' nonsense about the evils of Islam. If you want to know what Mr Golding thinks about Islam then perhaps a good place to start is with his hate-filled 'newspaper.'

Let's start with the December 2015 edition of Britain First's

paper which leads with the provocative title: “World War 3 has Begun: Time to Stop Pretending the World isn’t Heading for Bloodshed!” Be afraid, very afraid, as “This war will happen on the streets of Britain... in town centres, workplaces, concert halls and millions will perish.” Mr Golding warns: “We [by which he means non-Muslims] will become second class citizens suffering racism, hostility and discrimination on a galactic scale.”

Confused about whether the war has already begun, or is soon to begin, Mr Golding says that Muslim refugees are in actual fact “soldiers” who “have been sent to fight” on British shores. Once “their numbers are strong enough, they will wage war against anyone who attempts to stand in the way of their religious agenda” (October 2015). If you are not convinced by such warmongering nonsense Mr Golding asserts that Muslims have already committed genocide upon Christians in the Middle East. Yes, you might have missed that one, but Mr Golding, the Christian patriot par excellence, “has long argued that almost every single church in the West is shamefully silent about the genocide of the Christians in the Middle East” (February 2016).

The peaceful distribution of leaflets and newspapers is, of course, not what Mr Golding has in mind when he, and his missionaries, makes their little excursions to Leicester (or any other town for that matter). Instead, they are quite clear that they intend to stoke the furnaces of hatred against Muslims by building upon the relentless torrent of lies that have already been told about Muslims in the media. Mr Golding’s most recent paper is emphatic, stating that Britain First and their Christian patriots aim to oppose all Muslims because, as Mr Golding says, “it is the duty of all good, observant Muslims to wage war against” Britain. Apparently good Muslims are “duty bound to wage war” – “there is no neutral ground.”

So, when Mr Golding comes to Leicester, he comes in the name of war. As he puts it: “We must start to fight back now if we are to avert [a] horrendous and humiliating fate as a nation” (December 2015). So if you, like me, oppose Mr Golding’s plans to incite war on our streets, join the peaceful welcoming party for Britain First on Saturday (June 4) in Leicester by the Clock Tower from 12pm.

A Short Note on Why the Government's PREVENT Strategy is Counterproductive (To Say the Least)

- August 22, 2016

Some people, especially those individuals whose job it is to educate people about the merits of the Government's PREVENT strategy, seem to believe that other people have misunderstood the political nature of PREVENT. Such 'PREVENT educators' say that there are "weird fabricated versions of PREVENT" being spread on social media amongst a "fog of conspiracy theories." They say that some people even believe that the PREVENT strategy is turning teachers into superspies, *a la* James Bond, 007! Such 'PREVENT educators' imply that to reject PREVENT is to embrace the nihilist alternative – "to do nothing to stop people becoming terrorists." But such ill-informed beliefs about PREVENT's critics misrepresent reality somewhat. I say this because all of the major unions, that represent the majority of workers in education, have spent years vocally opposing PREVENT.

For example, just last year at the 147th annual Trades Union Congress (a body which represents the democratic will of over 6 million trade members), a motion was (democratically) debated and then supported which gave voice to popular concerns about the regressive nature of PREVENT, and also discussed ways in which trade unions might work most productively to respond to extremism. The part of this motion that pertained to PREVENT noted that the TUC "recognises the danger that implementation of PREVENT could destroy relationships between teachers and learners, close down space for open discussion in a safe and secure environment and smother the legitimate expression of political opinion."

Kathy Wallis from NASUWT moved the motion, making it clear that: "While we must be unstinting in the face of extremism, we must also stand firm against the governments whose response is to place greater restrictions on our human rights, not least freedom of association and of speech, thought, conscience and religion." Here Wallis pointed her union's critical finger firmly at David Cameron's Conservative Government, going on to explain:

Congress, it is hugely regrettable that prejudice and bigotry is

being stoked by a Government which has targeted and demonised religious and ethnic minorities, particularly Muslim communities. Far-right groups are now using the moral panic over the so-called Trojan horse to ignite hatred and division between groups.

Hank Roberts, the speaker from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) added:

The PREVENT Strategy can be viewed as a form of racial profiling and internal policing which is exacerbating Islamophobia and vilifying communities. We do not believe that this is the way to successfully deal with terrorism however defined. In fact, it is likely to be counterproductive. We take the view that safeguarding is the appropriate route. ATL believes that it is not the role of teachers or support staff to police those they teach...

This Government want to create a culture of fear. I taught for many years in a strong Irish community. It was at the time of the IRA bombs and deaths. A bomb factory was discovered in the next road to ours. The Emergency Powers Act, the Prevention of Terrorism Act and more followed. Nearly 2,000 civilians died and over 1,000 troops. Remember Birmingham, Guildford and, indeed, Brighton.

Even then, we were never asked to spy on and report pupils. Inducing a climate of fear is used to justify ever-greater repressive legislation. Action needs to be taken to support and safeguard the innocent, but it should be proportionate and not at the price of the loss of our civil liberties. Who would not accept that the UK's disastrous foreign policy has only exacerbated the radicalisation of many? It is disastrous foreign policy which has taught us nothing. It will not protect the innocent or solve the refugee crisis.

The Government's role should be, as with Ireland, to work for and support the peace process, not to escalate a war, escalate the removal of civil liberties and cause division in our schools and communities.

Rena Wood from UNISON also supported the motion observing how “A former senior police officer called [PREVENT] a toxic brand.” Interestingly, only one union spoke out in opposition to the motion. Thus Dave Muritu from the University and College Union (UCU), argued that the motion was “not strong enough on PREVENT as it calls for the unions to fall into line behind the Government’s agenda. At the UCU National Conference, we took the position to boycott PREVENT so this is why we ask you to oppose this motion.”

What is very clear is that within the educational profession there is very deep-seated opposition to PREVENT and everything it stands for. Indeed, earlier this year at the annual conference of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), a separate motion was passed calling for the Government’s PREVENT duty to be withdrawn and replaced with new guidance for schools. At the conference, NUT executive member Alex Kenny explained: “We want to keep children safe from those organisations who promote hatred and violence. But there are limits to what we can do, and PREVENT is making that harder” (*Daily Mail*, March 29).

Just Say No to PREVENT!

- August 30, 2016

Like many people, including all the largest education unions, Jeremy Corbyn has voiced his opposition to the government’s PREVENT counter-terrorism strategy, which he correctly says demonises Muslims. On the other hand, Owen Smith, the current individual leading the undemocratic coup against Corbyn, has come firmly down in support of PREVENT, stating that the Labour Party should “properly fund and resource the PREVENT agenda.” But support for PREVENT is not the norm outside of elite circles, and, due to the ongoing controversy, even the Home Affairs Select Committee (chaired by Keith Vaz) has called for an independent review of PREVENT (August 25, 2016). The Select Committee’s report on this matter observes:

David Anderson, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, agreed that wider engagement would be beneficial; otherwise there was a risk of ending up with a dialogue which only involved the Government and ‘people who think just like them’, and the mainstream ‘Muslim community talking to each other’ but neither side really engaging with each other. He suggested to us that the Muslim community felt ‘under siege’ and, though he did not agree there was any reason to believe PREVENT was not well-motivated, there was a risk that some parts of the Muslim community saw PREVENT as ‘a sort of spying programme’ when it was already feeling pressurised. He has therefore called for an independent review of the PREVENT strategy.

Outside of government offices, others are far more critical of PREVENT, and the nongovernmental organisation Rights Watch (UK) has just published a detailed report outlining why the PREVENT strategy, insofar as it applies to schools, “must be repealed and abandoned.” (“Preventing Education: Human Rights and UK Counter-Terrorism Policy in Schools,” July 2016.) However, as problematic as PREVENT currently appears, its problems are being actively exported to other countries, like the US, where its own so-called Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program is explicitly based upon the failing British example. Yet on American soil such CVE programs are also coming up against serious criticisms, as illustrated by Brennan Center for Justice’s short and informative report, “Countering Violent Extremism: Myths and Fact” (November 2015).

With the number of people and groups condemning CVE programs growing by the day, the panicked and extreme response of my own local PREVENT coordinator (based in the city of Leicester, UK) has been to stoop so low as to accuse critics of CVE programs of indirectly aiding ISIS! Indeed, last October the long-serving and disgruntled PREVENT TRUTHER based here in Leicester (Will Baldet) felt moved to tweet his own extreme and inflammatory viewpoint: “Sad that some popular UK groups demonise those doing this #CVE work, thereby indirectly aiding #ISIS.” (October 31, 2015) But Mr Baldet is obscenely wrong on this and so much more.

In the July issue of *Psychology Today*, Alice LoCicero and J. Wesley Boyd provided a devastating rebuttal to the propagandists for CVE.¹⁴ Dr LoCicero happens to be the co-founder and first president of the Society for Terrorism Research, and is well experienced to comment on such matters as she is also the author of two very relevant books, *Creating Young Martyrs: Conditions That Make Dying in a Terrorist Attack Seem Like a Good Idea* (2008), and *Why 'Good Kids' Turn into Deadly Terrorists* (2014). Her latest co-authored article gets straight to the point:

Is CVE the new Cointel-Pro? Kinda seems that way.

Cointel-Pro (short for Counterintelligence Program) was launched ‘...in 1956 to disrupt the activities of the Communist Party of the United States. In the 1960s, it was expanded to include a number of other domestic groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Socialist Workers Party, and the Black Panther Party . . . Cointel-Pro was later rightfully criticized by Congress and the American people for abridging first amendment rights and for other reasons’ (1).

Thanks to the courage of a small group of young adults, a brave reporter, and a determined editor, Cointel-Pro was exposed and stopped. You can learn about their work in the book *The Burglary*, by Betty Metsger or watch the documentary film called simply *1971*.

But if the FBI learned anything from the rightful criticism of its Cointel-Pro, it has since apparently forgotten it. Currently, the FBI, in collaboration with the National Institute of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, and other government agencies, is again launching programs that are at best doomed-and at worst designed—to disrupt the Muslim communities in cities where they are launched...

Dr LoCicero and Dr Boyd’s article therefore comes to the fairly reasonable conclusion, noting:

¹⁴ Alice LoCicero and J. Wesley Boyd, “The dangers of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs,” *Psychology Today*, July 19, 2016.

We will not be participating in any CVE programs, and we strongly encourage other mental health professionals to also refuse for the following reasons:

We will not spy on our patients.

We do not read minds, and we know that none of us can predict the future.

We know of several non-punitive approaches to helping ALL kids resist ALL recruitment to violence. They are not high tech and they do not involve the FBI. They involve listening and talking to kids, mentoring kids, educating kids and helping them find paths to meaningful lives, honouring their communities here and any communities they are connected with in the US or elsewhere, and taking their grievances seriously.

We are as saddened and troubled by violence around the world as most others, but those feelings should not lead us down a path that includes the trampling of human rights or turning health care professionals into government informants.

Unpacking PREVENT: Islamophobia and the Counter-Terror Industry

- September 1, 2016

Last month *The Economist* published an intriguing article titled “Driving away the shadows,” a piece of journalism which sought to legitimate the British Government’s controversial and dangerous PREVENT counter-terrorism strategy. “In many ways it is odd that the most moderate of Britain’s counter-terror efforts provokes the most opposition,” concluded *The Economist*. “Perhaps the biggest secret, though, is that it is not as nasty as it seems.” But if PREVENT is moderate, this merely demonstrates the extreme nature of the British Government’s counter-productive counter-terrorism strategies.

Last year at the 147th annual Trades Union Congress... a motion was (democratically) debated and supported which gave voice to popular concerns about the regressive nature of PREVENT... But it is not just trade unions who have been vocal in their calls for the termination of PREVENT.¹⁵ In 2014, *The Economist* observed in an oblique review of Arun Kundnani's excellent book, *The Muslims Are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (2014), that the professor had "some fair points to make about the counter-productivity" of PREVENT – going on to point out that "his analysis of PREVENT rang true".¹⁶ Professor Kundnani's fair criticisms of the Government's counterproductive terror policies were then updated in his 2015 report, "A decade lost: rethinking radicalisation and extremism," which reaffirmed that "the government should end its PREVENT policy." He continued: "This will help to avoid nurturing a new generation of antagonised and disenfranchised citizens. Ultimately, PREVENT-style policies make Britain less safe."

Professor Kundnani's criticisms of PREVENT are not unique in this regard, and in April this year, Maina Kiai, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly, made his own position very clear: "It appears that PREVENT is having the opposite of its intended effect: by dividing, stigmatizing and alienating segments of the population, PREVENT could end up promoting extremism, rather than countering it." Nevertheless, in the face of overwhelming critical evidence, the individuals tasked with promoting PREVENT across the country, continue to misrepresent naysayers as conspiracy theorists and worse. PREVENT coordinator for Leicester, Will Baldet, provides a good example of such a committed practitioner – whose PREVENT advocacy this year alone has taken him far and wide, from an anti-terror roundtable in Kazakhstan to inclusion in *The Economist* feature mentioned at the top of this page.

Presently Mr Baldet is particularly concerned about the adversarial relationship that exists between PREVENT and trade

¹⁵ At the University and College Union's (UCU) annual conference in June, a motion titled "PREVENT - education is not surveillance" was agreed, which, amongst other things, resolved for the union "to work with students and others in opposing the PREVENT agenda."

¹⁶ "A convenient adversary?," *The Economist*, April 14, 2014.

unions active within the education sector. Hence he was quick to tweet his relief that the ATL, a smaller more conservative teaching union than its larger counterpart (the NUT), had decided at their annual conference to not oppose PREVENT like the NUT and UCU. His tweet read: “Today ATL Union members rejected motion of non-cooperation with #Prevent” (April 4). He then immediately tweeted: “#ATLConf2016 takes #Prevent motion in parts, passing parts 1 and 3 but not 2”. But what Mr Baldet failed to clarify, was that the ATL motion “PREVENT” – protection or provocation?” could hardly be said to be supportive of PREVENT. And although Mr Baldet tweeted an image of the ATL motion, it is noteworthy that he chose to exclude the introduction which made clear the general intent of the motion:

THAT Conference notes with deep concern the Government’s PREVENT strategy, which is exacerbating Islamophobia and labelling, alienating and marginalising individuals and communities. Conference further notes that the National Union of Students has adopted a position of non-cooperation with the PREVENT strategy.

As always, in response to the vocal criticisms of PREVENT emanating from the trade union movement, the rightwing press has been quick to attack the unions, and earlier in the year the *Daily Telegraph* (January 23) ran an article titled “NUT leaders ‘colluding to undermine anti-terror policies.’” Apparently, as the piece begins: “Leaders and activists of Britain’s biggest teachers’ union are colluding with Islamic extremists to undermine policies aimed at preventing terror attacks.” This undemocratic and downright false attack on PREVENT’s critics proved too good an opportunity for Mr Baldet (Leicester’s PREVENT coordinator) to miss, who first retweeted the *Telegraph’s* smear on January 24, and then reposted it on June 16, with his own fearmongering comment: “Some shocking stories from a London college, yet some still deny a problem. Very worrying.”

Evidently, providing meaningful evidence of wrongdoing isn’t high on Mr Baldet’s list of daily concerns with preventing extremism. And although the NUT were not allowed to rebut the content of the *Telegraph* smear, a local Blairite Labour Mayor, Sir Robin Wales, was introduced to condemn the NUT, as did Rupert Sutton, the well-

known pro-PREVENT terror expert based at the neoconservative Henry Jackson Society. Notably, the latter individual has been at the forefront of public attacks on the National Union of Students, and in response to a motion (that was passed at their conference) opposing PREVENT, he observed: “The passage of this motion is deeply worrying, as it mandates the UK’s largest student union not only actively to obstruct counter-extremism policy, but to work hand in hand with the very extremists such policy seeks to challenge in doing so.”

Let’s stop for a moment and remember that in 2010, four years into the PREVENT program - first set up by New Labour – the *Daily Telegraph* (March 31, 2010) called for the “scrapping” of PREVENT, a strategy “to be remembered as a textbook example of how to alienate absolutely everybody.” However, now that the Tories have strengthened and retooled PREVENT, the *Telegraph* has turned its vengeful column inches upon PREVENT’s leftwing critics, especially those in the trade union movement.

At the start of the year the *Daily Telegraph* ran with another unfortunate Islamophobic rant titled “Muslim extremists’ ‘campaign of lies’ to undermine the government’s fight against terror” (January 30). Again, Mr Baldet was quick off the mark to legitimate the *Telegraph’s* besmirching of PREVENT’s opponents, first tweeting “Investigation reveals coordinated attempts to derail vital counter terrorism work” (January 31); which was shortly followed by “It’s telling when #Prevent’s critics have to fabricate stories. It tells me their arguments are baseless, unfounded” (January 31). But Mr Baldet failed to remember that the author of this latest *exposé* was the same infamous Islamophobe, Andrew Gilligan, who, for the record had penned the aforementioned NUT smear for the same newspaper of ill repute.

Gilligan’s hateful article about Muslims focused its lies upon a woman named Ifhat Smith – the mother of “a Muslim schoolboy from London [who] was ‘interrogated like a criminal’ for using the phrase ‘ecoterrorism’ in class.” But according to Gilligan, Mrs Smith was no “ordinary Muslim” but was instead an anti-PREVENT campaigner – although here the article deliberately clouds the issue of whether she became a critic of PREVENT before or after her son faced his interrogation. Gilligan is clear, however, that Mrs Smith “is in fact... a

key figure in the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, which believes in replacing secular democratic government with Islamic government.” Gilligan was referring to Mrs Smith’s connection to “the London office of Ennadha,” which he says is “a Tunisian Islamist party which grew out of and is allied to the Muslim Brotherhood.” He says she was “in charge” of the office; Mrs Smith, on the other hand, says she was just a volunteer trying to counter extremism.

Either way, Mrs Smith’s connection to Ennadha is irrelevant — as should have been perfectly clear to Mr Baldet — as it is not an extremist organisation. To her credit, Mrs Smith had a long history of engaging in anti-extremist activism, volunteering in such welcome ventures like ‘Islam is Peace’ — which was affiliated to the moderate Islamist Ennadha movement. The use of “moderate” as a descriptor of Ennadha is exemplified by the fact that in 2012, their president, Rached Ghannouchi was given the prestigious Chatham House Prize by Prince Andrew, Duke of York, for promoting “a culture of tolerance and bridge-building across the political spectrum”. This award for Ghannouchi’s democratic commitments followed shortly after *The Economist* had libelled his good name, a mistake for which the magazine issued a little-noticed apology.

Having found a well-paying Islamophobic niche at the *Daily Telegraph*, Mr Gilligan’s well-publicised endeavours to demonise Muslims (and the Left more generally) continue to rely upon the expert testimony of the uber-Tory terror experts at the Henry Jackson Society. Ironically, in his article attacking Mrs Smith, Hannah Stuart, a Henry Jackson Society expert, even stooped so low as to accuse “terrorist sympathisers” “with their campaign of lies” of “using the media to make it harder for the authorities to fight terrorism”. Yet the opposite appears to be the case, with mainstream media commentators proving themselves quite capable of abusing newspaper columns to scapegoat Muslims, and in the process undermining any genuine efforts to fight terrorism. However, Stuart, the so-called counter-extremism expert cited in this instance, did have one useful tip that Mr Baldet would do well to follow. Stuart suggested that “journalists” (and arguably PREVENT coordinators) should “check basic facts and ask simple questions about the identity and motivations of the people making...claims” relating to extremism (although of

course, here she was talking about PREVENT's critics, not its proponents).

In conclusion, I would suggest that if Mr Baldet is keen to root out the extremists in our midst, he would do well to stop spreading lies about the critics of PREVENT, so he can refocus his attention on the manoeuvres of the Henry Jackson Society – a Society which in the words of one journalist is pervaded with a “spirit of intolerance”.¹⁷ Luckily for Mr Baldet (and for the rest of us) a detailed investigation into the anti-democratic actions of the Henry Jackson Society was published just last year by Spinwatch as “The Henry Jackson Society and the degeneration of British neoconservatism: liberal interventionism, Islamophobia and the ‘war on terror’”. So maybe Mr Baldet might do us all a favour and read this report before he continues legitimating their illiberal paranoid Islamophobic ramblings about PREVENT's critics in the name of fighting extremism!

Climate of Fear: “The Battle for British Islam,” a Critical Review - July 10, 2016

Earlier this year Sara Khan published a confused book with the ambitious and progressive-sounding title *The Battle for British Islam: Reclaiming Muslim Identity from Extremism*. But the book is far from ambitious or progressive, quite the opposite in fact. In rare moments the book sneaks in glancing criticisms of the British government's “draconian” (p.189) methods of fighting Muslim extremism, but on the whole *The Battle for British Islam* is best seen as another tedious defence of the government's PREVENT strategy – a strategy which ostensibly aims to stop people (most particularly Muslims) from becoming terrorists, but in reality does nothing of the sort.

Nevertheless despite the books glaring faults, a few bits of useful information can still be salvaged from its troublesome pages. For a start, Khan is at least willing to state the unpalatable truth that “As Muslims in the UK face increasing anti-Muslim attacks, there is a sense

¹⁷ James Bloodworth, “Labour should cut its ties with the illiberal Henry Jackson Society,” *Guardian*, May 20, 2013.

that the media are only too happy to report Muslims as perpetrators of violence but never as its victims.” (p.147) “Since the Salman Rushdie affair in 1989,” Khan writes, “British Muslims have become a regular subject for the media.” She therefore acknowledges that “the media has not captured the life experience of most ordinary Muslims who are not involved in these activities.” (p.147)

To provide further evidence of the long-standing demonisation of Muslims in the British media she refers her readers to two important studies. Quoting directly from the conclusion to the first academic study (“The Media and Muslims in the UK”)¹⁸ Khan highlights how “representations of Muslims in the British media are persistently negative, unfair and discriminatory and have subsequently contributed to establishing a climate of fear or a ‘moral panic’ with the Muslim ‘folk devil’ at its heart.” (p.147) She then refers to a more recent Cardiff University study which “found that reporting on refugees was more ‘polarised and aggressive’ in the UK than any other country in Europe.” (p.148)

But in keeping with Khan’s inability to interpret the world around her in a coherent way (unbefitting of someone who has written a contentious book about global issues) she chooses to downplay the systematic nature of the aforementioned demonisation of Muslims by commenting: “British media outlets have inadvertently provided grist for the far-Right propaganda mill.” (p.147) It seems to have slipped Khan’s attention that the majority of the mainstream media are owned by rightwing media moguls who take pride in actively encouraging their media outlets to demonise Muslims.

The *Daily Mail* has – as most people will realise – been at the centre of the relentless spreading of hate and fear about Islam (something made clear in the two aforementioned studies of the media). But Khan knows better, and notes that “Some newspapers have attempted remedial action.” (p.148) Here Khan is referring to just one rare instance in which the *Daily Mail* retracted one of their smears against Muslims. This impression of a commitment to “remedial action” is therefore misleading to say the least. Thankfully

¹⁸ Katy Sian *et al.*, “The Media and Muslims in the UK,” Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies, University of Leeds, March 2012.

a few pages later Khan at least ignores her own feelings on this matter to conclude that “the myth persists that the ideology of Islamism [that is, what she decries as a socio-political that ‘advocates an expansionist Islamic state governed by sharia law’] is the true expression of what it means to be a Muslim.” (p.150)

Given the fact that such a divisive myth persists, it is clear that there is a major misunderstanding of what Islam constitutes in the British context. As Khan explains, “a March 2015 poll conducted by the YouGov-Cambridge Programme reveal[ed] that over half of British voters (55 per cent) believed ‘there is a fundamental clash between Islam and the values of British society...’” (p.19) Khan is thus correct in stating that “Such emotional responses are further exploited by the far Right to nurture anti-Muslim hatred.” (p.19) No surprise there really.

Yet contrary to the incessant lies that have been told about Muslims in the mainstream media (since at least 1989), Khan notes that Muslims are remarkably patriotic. Hence:

Most opinion polls among Muslims evidence a strong endorsement of being British. A study by the think tank Demos showed that British Muslims tend to be more patriotic than the average citizen. (p.17)

Unfortunately Khan then adds her own negative proviso: “This may be the case, but a parallel trend over the past twenty-five years has seen some British Muslims become ever more conservative on social and equality issues.” (p.17) She adds: “Islamic extremism has wreaked havoc on the lives of British Muslims” and, as she goes on to explain, “The seemingly unstoppable growth of puritanical and Islamist ideology in Muslim communities troubles me deeply.” (p.17) But the irony here is that the article that she chose to cite in order to launch into her argument about the rightward drift of “some British Muslims” (“So, what do British Muslims really think?” by PREVENT critic Kenan Malik) makes it clear that...

...most studies show that Muslims are rarely drawn to jihadist groups because they already hold extremist religious views; rather it is their involvement in jihadism that leads them to accept religious extremism as a justification for their acts. As

the former CIA operation officer, now an academic and counter-terrorism consultant to the US and other governments, Marc Sageman, has put it, 'At the time they joined jihad terrorists were not very religious. They only became religious once they joined the jihad.' That is why we need to rethink our ideas about radicalisation and how to combat it.

This is an argument that runs entirely counter to the illogical posturing presented in Khan's own book-length defence of the British government's PREVENT strategy. Alternatively, one reasonable explanation for why "some British Muslims" may have adopted more conservative politics in recent decades might be said to be related to the work of CIA officers like Marc Sageman who, during the 1980s, actually contributed towards the US government's recruitment, radicalisation, and financial support of Islamists and Salafists in Afghanistan, as part of the ongoing 'Cold War' being waged against communism.

Although not given prominence in Khan's government-sanctioned tale of radicalisation she does at one point point towards the roots of Britain's current problems: "Islamist groups [like the Muslim Brotherhood] have been present in the UK since the 1960s, but from the late 1980s faced 'a significant challenge for community support from militant Salafists who had returned to the UK after fighting in Afghanistan and regarded the Brotherhood as ineffective.'" (p.53) A few pages later Khan even explains how a group that was founded in 1984 by Abu Muntasir actually "spearheaded the spread of Salafism in the UK." And while Abu Muntasir has now turned his back on this violent past (that used to be funded by western governments) Khan notes that he had previously "waged jihad in the 1980s and 1990s fighting in Afghanistan, Kashmir, Burma, Bosnia and Chechnya." (p.55) Khan notes that Abu Muntasir now rejects violence, but at no point does she make the obvious connection between the support given by the British and American governments to such militant Salafists and the growth of conservative Muslim ideologies in Britain.

On the other hand, this tragic connection between the violent anti-democratic foreign policy of western governments and the growth

of Islamism is something that is central to the political arguments that have been made by Seumas Milne. Discussing terrorist attacks in his December 2013 article “Woolwich attack: If the whole world’s a battlefield, that holds in Woolwich as well as Waziristan”, Milne observed:

To say these attacks are about ‘foreign policy’ prettifies the reality. They are the predicted consequence of an avalanche of violence unleashed by the US, Britain and others in eight direct military interventions in Arab and Muslim countries that have left hundreds of thousands of dead. Only the wilfully blind or ignorant can be shocked when there is blowback from that onslaught at home. The surprise should be that there haven’t been more such atrocities.

Rather than learn anything from this article, Khan refers to Milne’s article to make the point that some writers (not her) suggest that young Muslims may become radicalised by our government’s foreign policy. Khan goes on to add that Milne...

...has set out in other articles a prevalent view among many in the mainstream Left that ISIS is not just an accidental bi-product of military action by the West in the Middle East. Milne previously cited a 2012 secret US intelligence report that countenanced a ‘Salafist principality’ in eastern Syria. Milne does not assert that the UK and US directly created ISIS but that it exploited the existence of the group against other forces in the region. Essentially, he sees ISIS as fitting into an imperialist project of classic divide and rule. (p.46)

But after citing such damning evidence, Khan concludes that “grievance over foreign policy is not enough” to explain radicalisation of individual Muslims; apparently it is more complicated than this. Khan explains: “The reason why some young people in Britain find the ISIS ideology attractive is in part based on the discourse that has developed within British Islam in recent years.” (p.50) It is truly amazing how Khan feels able to belittle the blowback caused by the massive support that was provided by the west for the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan (in the 1980s) and in Bosnia and Chechnya (in the 1990s)

and then simply shift the blame to a separate narrative of extremism that grew in dominance within Muslim communities.

So in the same way it is unsurprising that Khan should also brush aside the influence of social deprivation on the radicalisation of poor communities, Muslim or otherwise. Khan thus writes that “Some believe the overriding factors [driving radicalisation] are poverty and social deprivation feeding a grievance against western society.” (p.45) Here she points to the writings of French economist Thomas Piketty as one prominent proponent of this commonly made socialist argument. Khan says such an argument “brushes over the fact that many convicted terrorists” come from middle-class backgrounds. (p.46) But it is hardly controversial to think that better educated (perhaps slightly less impoverished) individuals might become radicalised by the ever-increasing levels of social and economic inequality within society, even if they personally do not suffer its worst ravages.

Following on from Khan’s inability to see the wood for the trees, Khan spends a good proportion of her book attacking the legitimacy of the democratic concerns of trade unions – the primary organisations of the working class that fight for economic and social justice worldwide. It is for good reasons that the two main unions in the education sector (the National Union of Teachers, and the University and College Union) are opposed to the governments regressive PREVENT strategy. But Khan is having none of their substantial and reasonable worries, and instead seeks to besmirch all legitimate criticisms of the government’s anti-terrorism strategy. One simple way in which Khan attempts to do this is by dwelling on the opportunist and problematic political approach that has been promoted by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), as if it is identical with the actions of all other socialists and trade unionists (the overwhelming majority of whom are not members of the SWP). Khan of course neglects to mention that other socialist organisations have always been critical of the SWP’s uncritical orientation and accommodation towards rightwing Islamists, whether that be within the Stop the War Coalition or within electoral coalitions like Respect.¹⁹

¹⁹ Peter Taafe, *Socialism and Left Unity - A critique of the Socialist Workers*

Perhaps the most significant source of Khan's criticisms of socialists who brush over important class-based criticisms of rightwing Islamist groups is Maryam Namazie's 2013 pamphlet *Siding with the Oppressor: The Pro-Islamist Left*. But while Khan only draws upon this pamphlet to misrepresent and attack the Left, it should be noted that if Khan had properly engaged with the arguments made within this pamphlet she would have reflected upon Namazie's concluding statement which explained:

What's most ironic is that Islamism is a force that came into existence as a far-Right, anti-Left movement, supported by Western powers. It's only after 9/11 that their relationship has changed and only to some extent. It's still a close ally in helping to manage revolutions and rebellions in the Middle East and North Africa. (p.60)

Given this history of western support for the rise of rightwing Islamists it is ironic that Khan, in attempting to ridicule the National Union of Students (NUS) for opposing PREVENT, feels able to write that, according to the NUS, "PREVENT has apparently launched a new 'Cold War' against Islam and Muslims; and the battle against 'Islamic extremism' parallels that against communism and the Soviet Union, which gave rise to McCarthyite hysteria." (p.107) But such snide commentary on Khan's part only goes to demonstrate how naïve she is about the cynical way in which successive imperialist British governments have sought to divide the global working class.

So while Khan is quick to chastise all groups with genuine criticisms of PREVENT as having sinister ulterior motives, she is a little too keen to think that whenever the government acts in way that can be construed as racist it is largely by virtue of an unforeseen slip-up. A case in point was provided in January 2016 when David Cameron announced "a £20-million fund to help Muslim women with little or no command of English." Keeping to form, Cameron put a racist spin on this announcement by linking his statement to the need to counter the rise of Muslim extremism. Khan says drawing such a link was pure "miscommunication" and so was "counter-productive

and unnecessary.” She can only come to this ill-judged conclusion because she imputed only positive aspirations on the part of the Tory government; stating that the fund “had plenty to commend it, advocating gender equality and real freedom of choice for both women and girls – all good progressive stuff.” (p.188) Once again all historical context had evidently passed by Khan’s critical faculties, because as many commentators made clear at the time, this new £20-million fund was announced shortly after the government had just slashed £45 million from their ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programmes.

The current Tory government, much like the New Labour government that preceded it, are proud representatives of the interests of the 1% establishment at the expense of the rest of us, the 99%. So in much the same way that the political establishment sought to demonise both socialists and communists during the Cold War, since the end of the Cold War, ruling governments of the day have found a ready scapegoat for all society’s ills in Islam. The government has also found a willing partner in arms to mystify the roots of Muslim extremism and how we might go about countering its threat in the bodily form of Sara Khan.

Contrary to what Khan has to say on the matter, the government’s PREVENT strategy is not part of any real solution to “The Battle for British Islam.” And as genuine socialists like Jeremy Corbyn fully understand, PREVENT is a critical part of the government’s counterproductive counter-terrorism strategy that, not only demonises Muslims, but also creates a climate of fear that can only continue to the radicalisation of young and rightfully angry Muslims. Sara Khan might not have a vested interest in learning any lessons from history, but the rest of us certainly do, especially if you have any interest in the promotion of peace, justice, or equality.

The Tories Real Safeguarding Concern is to Their Hated Anti-Terrorism Strategy, Not To Our Children

- November 20, 2016

Making sure that we (the people) elect Government's that serves to act to defend the needs of the most vulnerable is a critical function of elections. But when vast swaths of the population rightly feel that there is no palpable difference between the major political parties, then you have the unfortunate situation where many people don't even bother to vote at all. This problem is aggravated by the fact that in recent decades none of the mainstream parties have fought to represent the needs of the majority, and instead have chosen to pander to the insatiable needs of big business. This troublesome situation is slowly beginning to change for the better in Britain, now that a principled socialist politician has been elected as the leader of the Labour Party... but much more still needs to be done.

Governments, of course, have a statutory duty to look after the young and old alike; although this duty hasn't stopped the Government from destroying vital public services that cater to the needs of such groups. For example, since 2010, successive Governments have reduced the funding they provide to local authorities by more than 40%. Here in Leicester, where I live, this has resulted in the closure or sale of all of our cities old people's homes, and the threatened closure of our city's nine adventure playgrounds — which happen to cater to the needs of Leicester's most impoverished communities. More broadly, on a national level, the Government (with the help of rightwing Labour MPs) are presently finalising their latest attacks upon the elderly.²⁰

Funding cuts to the education system has proven to be a key front for Government attacks on our children. But whilst they actively undermining the very fabric of Britain's education system through their serial underfunding of our schools, the Government keep up the pretence that they are concerned about safeguarding our children: the Government definition of safeguarding being "broader than 'child protection' and relates to the action taken to promote the welfare of

²⁰ Tom Barker, "Arch Labour Blairite heading committee proposing savage cuts to pensioners," *Evolve Politics*, November 7, 2016.

children and protect them from harm.” Yet if such a commitment to our children were genuine, then surely the Government should desist from promoting the failed idea of austerity, which instead of solving any economic or political problems is only serving to push more and more families into poverty. According to the Government, safeguarding is defined as:

- “protecting children from maltreatment
- “preventing impairment of children’s health and development
- “ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care and
- “taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.”

Unfortunately the Government seems determined to continue failing on all of these safeguarding issues. Nevertheless, this enduring failure to look after our children does not prevent Tory Ministers from lecturing those in the caring professions. A good example here is provided by Tory Security Minister, Ben Wallace, who presents himself as the czar of safeguarding, which he does through his unrelenting commitment to the Government’s so-called anti-terrorism strategy, otherwise known as PREVENT.

In the latest edition of *Prospect* magazine, Wallace authored an article titled “In defence of the Prevent Strategy,” in which he states: “The [PREVENT] programme is just one of the strands that feeds into safeguarding vulnerable people” from exploitation. Without presenting any credible evidence Wallace falsely asserts that all the vocal critics of PREVENT – which happen to include all the major education unions – are doing so “Without any credible evidence being presented...” Apparently such critics are misrepresenting PREVENT: “They have chosen to listen to the few and not the many,” lectures Wallace. This is cheap coming from a Tory Minister whose membership of the main party waging class warfare amongst the majority, necessitates that he himself listens to and represents the few and not the many!

In this instance it seems that Wallace felt particularly compelled to write on the issue of PREVENT and safeguarding because the previous issue of *Prospect* magazine had run with the article “Why we

should scrap the PREVENT Strategy.” And although this earlier article was not broadly critical of the problematic and counterproductive ambitions of the Government’s alleged anti-terror strategies, the author of the article in question was still able to conclude that the PREVENT...

...brand has become toxic beyond repair. In fact, there are signs that it might actually be working against its professed aims. The UN’s special rapporteur on the right to freedom of assembly recently said ‘by dividing, stigmatising and alienating segments of the population, PREVENT could end up promoting extremism, rather than countering it.’

Resisting Trump’s Scapegoating of Muslims

- January 29, 2017

The scapegoating of minority communities is a tried and tested means by which the ruling-class attempts to deflect attention away from their own predatory and abusive relationship with the rest of us, the 99%. In the United States this is a dangerous strategy of division that both the Democrats and the Republicans have down to a tee. Donald Trump, the current international hatemonger-in-residence at the Whitehouse, however, has plans to take such vicious acts of misdirection to a whole other level. This can be seen by his latest Executive Order (made on Friday) that bars residents from seven Muslim majority countries from even entering the United States!

Outrageously, Theresa May, who has just spent some time in the US with the orange predator-in-chief, didn’t care too much about Trump’s vile affront on democracy. But fortunately the same passivity does not hold true for the majority of the British public. Earlier this morning an online petition was set up to “Prevent Donald Trump from making a State Visit to the United Kingdom.” Now, at the time of publishing this post just over 400,000 people had signed the petition, with more still signing-up at a rate of 1,000 per minute! Longstanding anti-racism campaigner and present leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, has also made his opposition to Trump’s anti-democratic agenda clear:

Donald Trump should not be welcomed to Britain while he abuses our shared values with his shameful Muslim ban and attacks on refugees' and women's rights. Theresa May would be failing the British people if she does not postpone the state visit and condemn Trump's actions in the clearest terms. That's what Britain expects and deserves.²¹

The Muslim Council of Britain likewise condemned Trump's Executive Order, noting that the Council:

...calls on our British government to speak out much more forcefully and stand up for the British values it supposedly seeks from others. For all intents and purposes this is a Muslim ban designed not to confront terrorism but to placate the most hateful sections of American society.²²

Harun Khan, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain said:

This ban on Muslims is not only an inconvenience, it is downright dangerous to our values of equality and non-discrimination. We are told that British values include the rule of law and 'mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith.'

In response to this latest incidence of bigotry on Trump's part and spinelessness on May's part, protests are taking place across Britain to show solidarity with the massive anti-Trump protests that are already ongoing in the United States.

On Monday a huge protest will be taking place in London (outside Downing Street from 6pm), while here in Leicester another large anti-Trump protest will begin at 5.30pm (in town by the Clock Tower). This is an important time to unite and come together to

²¹ Jon Stone, "Jeremy Corbyn calls for Donald Trump to be banned from UK visit until Muslim country travel ban is lifted," *Independent*, January 29, 2017.

²² "Trump's Muslim ban: time for our Government to stand up for British values," *Muslim Council of Britain*, January 29, 2017.

oppose racism and help build a mass alternative to the billionaire-classes politics of division. As Socialist Alternative's Seattle City Councillor, Kshama Sawant, puts it:

To answer Trump's vicious attacks will require for us to build up a determined, fighting movement; one that seeks to mobilise millions from below in collective struggle, building grassroots democratic structures and our own independent organisations. Symbolic resistance will not be enough. We need to build mass nonviolent civil disobedience. We need disruption of business as usual!²³

No to Terrorism, No to Hypocrisy

- May 23, 2017

Terrorism has no place in our world, and the tragic terrorist attack that took place last night is correctly being condemned by politicians of all political hues. The inspiring response from ordinary people to this latest bombing was astounding, once again demonstrating the strength of the bonds of solidarity that hold our democratic society together. The real hypocrites in this senseless farce are the politicians who profess their apparent deep-felt sorrow while simultaneously pursuing political policies that serve as a breeding ground for international terrorism. Politicians that support war after war in the Middle East know full well the toxic backlash caused by their imperialist misadventures, of that there can be no doubt. Yes, barbaric organisations like ISIS must be opposed, but the same must hold true for wars fought for oil and profits.

After the bombing, Theresa May proclaimed that we must "take on and defeat the ideology that often fuels" the violence of those who support ISIS. But the best way to achieve this goal would be to stop waging violent wars that slaughter endless thousands of people. In the meantime, politicians must refuse to scapegoat the Muslim

²³ "Kshama Sawant at Seattle's J20 'Resist Trump' mass rally," *YouTube*, January 23, 2017.

community, and oppose racist acts which further divide our communities.

UKIP's former hope for the future, now Independent MEP Steven Woolfe, is hardly a man known for his commitment to fighting racism; yet in his article for today's *Telegraph*, he at least admitted that "The vast majority of victims of Islamist terrorism are Muslims themselves."²⁴ Woolfe says that the ideology of ISIS should be killed but had no concrete suggestions for how this might be done. This is because this former lawyer for city hedge fund managers is the least likely person to champion a socialist alternative to our present economic and political system that seems only able to promote poverty, war and terrorism.

Nevertheless, Woolfe did at least draw attention to the fact that just yards from where the latest attack "occurred, there is a plaque that commemorates the Peterloo massacre (1819)." He noted how in the wake of this historic massacre "the movement for universal suffrage and extending the franchise grew stronger"; writing how, after much pressure, "The reactionary elites that resisted finally yielded to the overwhelming will of the people." This tale should therefore remind us that it is possible that the will of the people will once again overwhelm the will of reactionary elites, and that one day soon we may soon have the type of socialist political representatives who can once against help to lead a collective struggle that can bring peace and prosperity to the entire world.

The Haters: From Grenfell Tower to the Finsbury Park Mosque - June 19, 2017

The Tory hate-press make it their golden principle to whip up divisions within our communities. The relentless demonisation of Muslims in such media outlets is a perfect example of Tory extremism, closely followed by their vitriolic misrepresentation of

²⁴ Steven Woolfe, "Manchester will not be broken by evil Islamists. It's time to kill their poisonous ideology for good," *Daily Telegraph*, May 23, 2017.

socialism and its proponents in parliament. Here I am thinking most specifically of Jeremy Corbyn – the so-called terrorist sympathiser (who is anything but)!

Profit must always trump human life, so the story goes, and in this respect the horrific firetrap that was Grenfell Tower is yet the latest testament to the insanity of capitalism. That countless thousands of buildings are clad in such readily combustible tinder proves beyond all doubt that socialism is not a pipedream but a necessity. When local residents, friends and outraged individuals quickly organised themselves – in the best of Britain’s democratic traditions – to demand justice for the victims of Grenfell, the Tory press sought (unsuccessfully) to turn public opinion against them.

On Friday the *Daily Telegraph* (June 16) featured an article titled “Mustafa Almansur: Who is the organiser of the Grenfell Tower protest movement?” The article revealed the apparently shocking news that Mustafa “is a Jeremy Corbyn-supporting political activist” and then, in their bid to denigrate his good name, felt obliged to add that he “used to be spokesman for the Finsbury Park Mosque, [and] had been arrested 10 years ago by the Metropolitan Police on suspicion of terrorism offences.” Although the “newspaper” admitted that Mustafa was not actually guilty of any crime, now or in the past, their sensational revelations were only made in a blatant attempt to fuel the type of division that naturally follows in the wake of the Tory presses’ daily outflow of bile-laden Islamophobia.

For those who are too easily sucked in by lies about Muslims and the much-maligned Finsbury Park Mosque, acts of retribution and terror may come to be seen as necessary, as some form of payback for the alleged Muslim-takeover of Britain. Sunday night’s terrorist attack provided just one nightmarish example of how extremist responses may be incited by daily provocation and misinformation. It should not be seen as coincidental that the target of Britain’s latest terror attack chose was unleashed upon Muslims praying at the aforementioned Finsbury Park Mosque.

Opposing Britain First's March on Birmingham

- June 20, 2017

Tiny far-right groups like Britain First are crackpot racists, who in their desperation to grow a little (just a little) are trying to make political capital out of the latest terror attack upon Muslims. None too surprisingly Sunday's Muslim-murderer seems to have had a soft spot for Britain First's leader, Paul Golding, whose twitter feed featured among just a handful of twitter accounts that was being followed by the killer.

In the wake of the vile attack the mainstream media have been quick to criticise right-wing extremism, but only after making sure that the right-wingers have had ample opportunity to broadcast their views across our national media. Leading Muslim-hater and former head of the street-fighting English Defence League (EDL) graced our televisions this morning courtesy of Piers Morgan and Good Morning Britain.²⁵ Paul Golding on the other hand made the headlines in national newspapers earlier this year when he retweeted a video of what he said was a "video of Muslims in London rejoicing at the Paris attacks" which in actual fact was a Pakistani cricket celebration from 2009. But following Sunday's brutal terror attack upon Muslims at Finsbury Park Mosque (which racists seem to believe represents a legitimate target for such terror attacks) Golding has invited his fellow extremists from across Europe to march through Birmingham to stoke up racial tensions.

Evidently Golding and his opportunist far-right friends are completely befuddled in the wake of the snap general election, as it seems to have passed them by that British people are seeking a genuine socialist answer to years of austerity, international wars, growing threats of terrorism and escalating levels of poverty. So while Tony Blair's "New Labour" and the Tories (the DUP, UKIP and the Lib-Dems) had all been united in promoting uncertainty and ethnically-riven splits within the working-class, Jeremy Corbyn is changing all that, and it couldn't come a moment too soon.

²⁵ Samuel Osborne, "Finsbury Park mosque attack," *Independent*, June 20, 2017.

Moreover, if the heartless and hatemongering Tories can be forced out of office any day, Corbyn may soon arrive in Downing Street – whereupon he will be able to bring an end to the politics of austerity and ensure that the ordinary people (the 99%) reap the benefits of living in the fifth richest country in the world. By providing a political solution to the root causes of poverty (of a lack of public housing, schools, and decent paying jobs), Corbyn’s anti-austerity politics can help undercut the racism that is so insidiously promoted on a daily basis by the political representatives of the 1% in the mainstream media (whether it be on the BBC or on Sky News).

A million-plus people may be marching in London on July 1st in an effort to kick the Tories out, while just a hundred or so racists (if they are lucky) will be trying to spread hate in Birmingham this weekend. But it is critical to note that the key way to oppose such racists is by organising on the streets; working-class communities must continue to organise massive counter-demonstrations to ensure that Britain First receive the message loud and clear that they are not welcome on our streets. We do not ban such groups, but what we certainly do is make sure they know they are not welcome. However, right-wing “New Labour” MPs like Birmingham’s very own Khalid Mahmood has other ideas for how to oppose the far-right and wants Britain First’s march to be cancelled by the police. This response has enabled Britain First to ramp up their publicity for the planned demonstration as they are now saying to hundreds of thousands of the viewers of their social media accounts that a Muslim “socialist” is denying them their democratic right to march.

Needless to say Khalid Mahmood is no socialist, and a good demonstration of this is the fact that for the past two years – much like the majority of his fellow “New Labour” MPs – he has not passed up on a single opportunity in his attempts to depose Corbyn. We should be clear, it is precisely because of the decidedly anti-working-class policies that have been pursued by such sell-outs like Mahmood that racism has been able to flourish in our society. This need not be the case any longer. Labour Party activists up and down the country are now demanding the right to select MPs that represent working-class interests before the needs of big business. We need Labour representatives like Jeremy Corbyn, elected representatives who will put our needs before their careers and help bring an end to racism

and division in Britain now, not later.

Islamophobia in the News Again

- November 13, 2017

Last week the Government released its latest national data on the consequences of its unrelenting commitment to the promotion of Islamophobia. The Government revealed that the majority of the people “supported” by their PREVENT programme between April 2015 and March 2016 were Muslims (or 65% of the 7,631 of the total individuals “supported”). Here in Leicester our local newspaper led with a sad headline that announced, “More than 150 children in East Midlands referred to anti-extremism programme in one year” (November 9, *Leicester Mercury*). The report likewise flagged-up the supportive bias towards Muslims, noting that “The data, released by the Home Office, shows that in 342 cases - roughly six in ten - the concern flagged up to authorities was of Islamist extremism.” This racial focus upon Muslims is tragically not all that new, and earlier this year an academic report observed:

It... seems apparent that the discourse of de-radicalisation has disproportionately profiled Muslim communities despite claims of neutrality, objectivity and non-discrimination. Official statistics go on to support this argument and reveal how PREVENT overwhelmingly targets Muslims. Data released by the Association of Chief Police Officers under the Freedom of Information Act, for example, shows that from 2007/08 until 2010/11, 67% of all people referred to Channel were Muslim. For unknown reasons, data was not collected on religion between January 2011 and March 2012. When data was re-collected from 2012 until 2014, it revealed that 57% of all referrals made to Channel were Muslim. Then from 2014 until 2016, it shows that 87% of Channel referrals were Muslim. Undoubtedly the ‘central fixation’ for law enforcement officials has been upon the profiling of

Muslims.²⁶

More recently, in answering the question as to what does the Government's latest data really mean, Dr Rizwaan Sabir accurately tweeted:

Very briefly 1) the education sector's heavily involved in making referrals; 2) the logic of PREVENT is highly 'racialized'; and 3) the theory that PREVENT (and those implementing it) are disproportionately targeting Muslims is supported with facts. (November 9, 2017)

Moving forward, arguably the best way to oppose our Government's longstanding commitment to racism and Islamophobia is by raising working-class demands that can unite the majority of people against our minority-rulers. But in fighting to hold aloft such demands it is critical that we don't simply respond to the racism inherent in Government programmes like PREVENT by campaigning against such problems as stand-alone issues, separate from austerity and the ongoing political attacks on the working class more generally - a mistake that campaigns like Stand Up to Racism tend to make. There are very many serious problems in this world, including not least terrorism, but the best way to eliminate such threats is by campaigning for socialism and opposing capitalism - an economic and political system that only serves to serve up poverty, war, oppression and exploitation to the working class.

²⁶ Katy Sian, "Born radicals? PREVENT, positivism, and 'race-thinking'," *Palgrave Communications* 3(6), 2017.

Hating on Muslims: From Britain, to Burma, to India, to Trump - December 13, 2017

Islamophobia is rife in the mainstream media, and its relentless propagation only serves to spread hate and misunderstanding. Notable for their commitment to hate-speech, the British newspapers owned by conservative media baron Rupert Murdoch (i.e., *The Sun* and *The Times*) are leading culprits in the ongoing demonisation of Muslims. Last Friday, however, *The Times* did something different and reported on the aftermath caused by the global monsterring of those of another faith. Bizarrely, without mentioning the word Muslim or Islam even once, the newspaper reported how the “Rohingya crisis” has now led to the creation of a refugee camp containing 600,000 people that is situated in southern Bangladesh. The longstanding oppression of Burma’s Muslim minority was then highlighted by a short interview with Ayesha Aktar who “was born in the original camp 19 years ago, to her refugee parents, among the first wave of Rohingya to seek sanctuary from persecution in Rakhine state, Burma.” The *Times* article continues:

In the past three months, she has watched in astonishment as the thousands of refugees who began arriving in late August turned into tens, then hundreds of thousands.²⁷

This is a crisis of epic proportions which has been fuelled by rampant Islamophobia, and now the situation is desperate, and as part of their “Christmas Appeal” *The Times* explains:

The race is now on to transform the camps and the lives of those living in them before the rainy season in March, which threatens to bring landslides, flooding and potentially mass disease as hastily dug wells and latrines fail.

²⁷ “Rohingya crisis spawns refugee city,” *The Times*, December 8, p.37. For socialist coverage of this issue, see George Martin Fell Brown, “Myanmar: ‘ethnic cleansing’ of Rohingya causes worldwide outrage,” *Socialist Alternative*, September 22, 2017.

On the following page of *The Times* another article dealt with another predictable consequence of the misrepresentation of those who hold true to the Islamic faith. This horrifying article focused on the story of a “shocking video” of a Hindu man murdering a Muslim man which was “first shared on WhatsApp by the killer, has led to outrage across India and fears that it will trigger communal violence.”

The victim, a 50-year-old Muslim labourer named as Mohammad Afrazul, was accused of courting a Hindu woman in the northern city of Udaipur, in Rajasthan state.” While the killer stated clearly in his viral video “that he carried out the murder to ‘protect the honour of Hindus against Muslims.’” *The Times* article even went some way towards explaining the historical reasons why the murder might have happened in the first place (in the concluding paragraphs anyway) noting:

Rajasthan is governed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Narendra Modi, which has been accused of fomenting religious hatred with its aggressive brand of Hindu nationalism. Mr Modi’s premiership has been marked by a string of fatal attacks on Muslims by Hindu gangs.

Tensions have been running high again as India marks 25 years since one of the most notorious incidents of religious violence in the country in recent times: the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in the northern city of Ayodhya by a Hindu mob. Many of the ringleaders of that attack now have senior positions in the BJP, and the incident remains a Faultline for religious tension. Hindu hardliners want a temple to the god Ram to be built on the site of the ruined mosque.²⁸

One wonders if mainstream commentators would ever see a connection between the escalating nature of the global persecution of Muslims and the rampant Islamophobia exhibited by both the press (that is, themselves) and most political elites. Indeed, just the week before the publication of the two *Times* articles, another terrifying example of the mainstream scapegoating of the entire Muslim community was evidenced by President Trump’s retweeting of a

²⁸ “Hindu films his murder of Muslim,” *The Times*, December 8, p.38

hateful video produced by Britain's most infamous Muslim-hating groups, Britain First.

There is a reason why principled socialists like Jeremy Corbyn have always used their political influence to oppose Islamophobia, the political persecution of minority groups, and far-right wing politics – be they of Britain First or of Mr Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party. And there is another reason why unprincipled parliamentary representatives of the Labour Party (like, for instance, Keith Vaz) are not reliable defenders of the working-class, be they Muslim, Hindu, Christian or otherwise. A socialist, democratic and peaceful alternative is possible, but now it must be fought for!

Child Rape and the Roots of Political Anger: Grooming Gangs in Context

- June 10, 2018

Ordinary working-class people are rightly appalled by the prevalence of all forms of sexual abuse. Every year tens of thousands of adults and children suffer from sexual violence, predominantly at the hands of violent men, often family members.²⁹ And every year thousands of people, especially those living in Britain's poorest communities, suffer disproportionate injustice at the hands of the State. This applies as much to the victims themselves, as it does to the public who must suffer the indignation of seeing wealthy rapists escaping meaningful justice because they can afford the best lawyers' money can buy.

It is well-known that money can buy virtual immunity from the law, and the poorer a suspected criminal is, the more likely it is that they will not be able to access even the more basic forms of defence within our legal system. Contrast, for instance, the treatment of the working-class suspects with the establishment's disgusting defence of powerful serial abusers like Jimmy Savile. This institutional injustice has been further worsened over the past decade because of the

²⁹ "Disclosure crisis reveals rape investigations are still all about victim 'credibility'," *End Violence Against Women*, June 5, 2018.

devastating effects of austerity – that is the transfer of wealth and resources from the working-class to the super-rich. This is concretely seen in low pay, bad working conditions, but also in the ongoing attacks upon basic much-needed community facilities, like youth services and rape crisis centres.

Victims of sexual violence, particularly when they grow up in poor working-class communities, face further injustices too. The elitist establishment has promoted victim-blaming when it comes to the rape of the poor and marginalised. Pamela Cox, professor of history and sociology at the University of Essex, explains:

Investigations into child sexual exploitation rings in Rochdale and elsewhere suggest that the girls involved were effectively demonised by many agencies. They were viewed by many in the police and social services as ‘chaotic’, cast as unruly, unreliable and unwilling to accept advice or support offered.³⁰

Historically, such problems have been amplified by ignorant anti-working-class politicians, like Blairite Simon Danczuk (MP for Rochdale between 2010 and 2016), whose regular diatribes against socialist ideas were featured in the *Daily Mail*.³¹ And here we should be reminded that it was an article carried in Rupert Murdoch’s Tory newspaper (*The Times*) in January 2011 that first kicked off the Islamophobic hysteria revolving around the existence of Asian grooming gangs. Murdoch and his newspapers of course having previously played a critical role in celebrating the rise to power of Tony Blair’s now-despised New Labour.

In this regard Murdoch and his friends in the Tory press were able to perpetuate their divisive and highly racialised Islamophobic reporting on the issue of grooming gangs precisely because they could rely upon New Labour’s open rejection of class politics. As Ella Cockbain, a researcher at UCL’s department of security and crime science reported in 2013, this deadly combination provided “ready

³⁰ Pamela Cox, “Blamed for being abused: an uncomfortable history of child sexual exploitation,” *The Conversation*, August 17, 2017.

³¹ Thomas Barker, “Corbyn’s enemies within: working class heroes or right wing populists?,” *CounterPunch*, December 31, 2015.

ammunition to right-wing extremist groups” which “have been quick to capitalise on the establishment’s perceived failure and the new social legitimacy of anti-Asian sentiment”.³² Pre-empting the ongoing Tommy Robinson debacle, Cockbain noted how:

The British National Party (BNP) narrowly missed rendering a recent prosecution of a major CSE [Child Sexual Exploitation] case a mistrial after its leader tweeted the supposed verdicts while the jury was still deliberating. The English Defence League (EDL) caused a two-week delay to the same trial after attacking two (Asian) defence barristers outside the court: such actions endanger defendants’ right to a fair trial, prolong the traumatic prosecution experience for complainants and incur considerable public costs. Meanwhile, perceiving the OCCE report as a ‘whitewash’, Britain First posted the Deputy Children’s Commissioner’s home address online and circulated it to thousands of supporters, placing her and her family at direct personal risk.

Child Sexual Exploitation cases, like that undertaken by grooming gangs, represent a tiny proportion of the total number of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) cases that take place every year. Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales clearly show the “two offences most clearly associated with CSE – abuse of children through sexual exploitation and sexual grooming – make up 3.0% of police recorded CSA cases in England and 2.0% of cases in Wales.”³³ We should also be aware that 42% of Child Sexual Abuse cases are carried out by family members, with another 8% by carried out by “partners or former partners”; and observe that the problem of sexual abuse

³² Muzammil Quraishi, “Child sexual exploitation and British Muslims: a modern moral panic,” in: Sadek Hamid (ed.), *Young British Muslims: Rhetoric & Realities* (2016); Ella Cockbain, “Grooming and the ‘Asian sex gang predator’: the construction of a racial crime threat,” *Race & Class*, 54(4), 2013.

³³ Liz Kelly and Kairika Karsna, “Measuring the scale and changing nature of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation,” *Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse*, July 2017.

extends across society with 3% of all women and 1% of all men report having been abused (via penetrative sexual assaults) as a child.

None of this stops the lies in the newspapers. The toxic nature of biased and racialised interventions by both the mainstream media and establishment politicians continues to act as a very real barrier to our collective ability to deal with the systemic nature of sexual crimes, whether that be against children or adults. But there is no point in pleading to the corporate media or establishment politicians to stop dividing the working-class with their fearmongering along racial and gendered lines; they know exactly what they are doing.

The political and economic establishment will do everything in its power to prevent the majority of us, the working-class, from organising to remove them from their high-and-mighty thrones. So, it makes sense that the same Establishment that seeks to divide us will use the mainstream media (be that the BBC or the *Daily Mail*) to spread lies and misinformation that undermine our ability to fight to improve our lives.

The majority of politicians from all political persuasions (be that UKIP or New Labour) have categorically failed us all. At a fundamental level this is because such politicians have been more concerned with catering to the needs of the corporate Establishment than they have with fighting to enrich the lives of an increasingly frustrated and angry electorate. Instead, we must now seize the future for ourselves and join Jeremy Corbyn and the hundreds of thousands of new Labour Party members in reclaiming the Labour Party from the Blairites and transforming it into a fighting organisation for the entire working-class

Hesitancy to Label Hate Crime in Leicester

- June 14, 2018

Most people in Leicester will be aware of the successful conviction of a hate-filled Islamophobe, Paul Moore, who attempted to kill two Somali women with his car late last year. One of Moore's innocent targets was Zaynab Hussein, a "Muslim mum who was twice mown down" by Moore's car because "he wanted revenge for [recent] terror

attacks in London.” As the *Leicester Mercury* (March 8) explained, Moore then “drove at a 12-year-old girl – who was also identifiable as a Muslim because, like Mrs Hussein, she was wearing a head scarf.” “Moore later told a relative he had driven his car at Mrs Hussein and the girl in response to Islamist terror attacks in the capital, saying the country would be ‘proud’ of him.”

As you might have expected the attacks were recorded by the Leicestershire Police as representing religiously-motivated hate crimes. But it turns out that the police actually needed a little prodding to come to this arguably obvious conclusion, as earlier tonight, at Leicester City’s full Council meeting, Cllr Abdul Osman pointed out how “the police at first were hesitant to report this as a hate crime, and I know that organisations like MEND and others and the Beaumont Leys Muslim community put pressure to be able to address this issue and bring it to justice and successful conviction.” At least the police got there in the end.

On other matters of Islamophobia, earlier today MEND (which is an “Anti-Islamophobia NGO aiming to empower and encourage Muslims to be more engaged in media and politics”) drew attention to an article from the *Jewish Chronicle* that was published as “Board announces ‘urgent review’ into deputy, after JC reveals she promoted ‘Islamophobic’ views” (June 14). This shocking article revealed that Roslyn Pine, who is one of the deputies of the Board of Deputies of British Jews – the group which was at the forefront of wrongly accusing Jeremy Corbyn of promoting anti-Semitism – had stooped so low as to describe Muslims as “the vilest of animals”. As the *Jewish Chronicle* noted:

The *JC* has seen tweets shared by Roslyn Pine, who stood unsuccessfully to be vice-president of the Board in last month’s elections, describing Muslims as ‘the vilest of animals’, as well as one describing Arabs as ‘so evil’. She also retweeted a message describing Arab migrants to Europe as ‘an invading army’.”

Speaking to the *Jewish Chronicle* to defend herself she was completely unrepentant for her earlier comments, saying:

There is no such word as Islamophobic. 'Islamophobia' is trying to shut down criticism of Islam. I detest the creed of Islam and I'm entitled to say it.

One can only wonder what Britain's rampantly Islamophobic mainstream media will make of all this. Maybe... just somehow, they will even be able to twist it all the better to attack socialists and most notably Jeremy Corbyn as being the real racists in society?!

The Rise of Islamophobic Anti-Semitic Hate Speech

- September 19, 2018

According to the US government-supported Counter Extremism Project:

A new European far-right group calling themselves Order of Dawn has apparently started a cryptocurrency crowdfunding campaign for their violent 'Reconquista' of Europe. Order of Dawn endorses racism and anti-Semitism. Specifically, the group is opposed to African and Middle Eastern migration to Europe, calling it an 'invasion' and a 'genocide,' and claims that the Jewish-owned media are hiding the true nature of the problem.³⁴

This concerning profile of what is an openly Nazi group makes one significant oversight, however; it neglects to point out that the main concern of the Order of Dawn is Muslims. In fact, it is this vile Islamophobia that is the feature of nearly all of the video clips embedded within their website. The Counter Extremism Project points out that a San Francisco-based company known as Cloudflare provides the nameserver for the Order of Dawn. The Project therefore warns: "Internet services companies, such as Cloudflare, should be on guard to make sure that they do not aid or assist terrorists." But Cloudflare should be more than on their guard, as they

³⁴ CEP Staff, "Far-Right European terrorist group crowdfunding cryptocurrency," *Counterpoint*, August 28, 2018.

are already assisting a violent Nazi organisation in their online funding and recruitment efforts. Yet Cloudflare don't seem to learn any lessons from their having provided services for another Nazi organisation known as Stormfront, which they dumped only last year.³⁵ This is why it remains a mystery as to why Cloudflare haven't yet dumped Order of Dawn.

Certainly, the type of anti-Muslim hate speech that is promoted by the Order of Dawn has gained in popularity in recent decades owing to the industrious efforts of mainstream politicians and media outlets in spreading lies and misinformation about Muslims and Islam more generally. The popularity of such Islamophobia can be seen by the number of views attracted by one of the videos that was reproduced on the Order of Dawn's website that is titled "Muslim Demographics" – which is packed full of lies and has had garnered over 16 million online views. For the sake of understanding the roots of such hate speech, this seven-minute video had previously gone viral in 2009, and provides references to a number of obscure anti-Muslim sources, the most significant of which were:

- an article titled "Global Jihad" that was publicised online by a far-right Catholic group known as "These Last Days Ministries" – a religious organisation that "linked... implantable microchips to the apocalyptic prophecy in the book of Revelation."³⁶
- a reference to the far-right blog "The Brussels Journal," which was established by Paul Beliën, who at the time had a number of his articles published in the *Daily Mail*
- an article authored by conservative journalist Mark Steyn who wrote a column for the *Daily Telegraph* until 2006
- and an article authored by Ed Vitagliang titled "Europe's chastisement?" which cited the dark anti-Muslim ramblings of

³⁵ Steven Johnson, "Why Cloudflare let an extremist stronghold burn," *The Wire*, January 16, 2018.

³⁶ Michael Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism* (1999); Todd Lewan, "Chips: high tech aids or tracking tools?," *Washington Post*, July 22, 2007.

the aforementioned Mark Steyn who was quoted saying: “Much of what we loosely call the Western world will not survive this century, and much of it will effectively disappear within our lifetimes, including many if not most Western European countries.” Here it is interesting to note that Ed Vitagliano is also the Executive Vice-President of American Family Association, a fundamentalist far-right Christian group that is an active supporter of the anti-LGBTQ World Congress of Families.³⁷

Such toxic Islamophobia has been the mainstay of the British media for years, in the same way that it is a central focus of the writings of Douglas Murray, who is a regular contributor to the *Daily Mail*, and the current Associate Director of the Islamophobic Henry Jackson Society. And here one only wonders what Sam Slack (who has been the regional HE/FE PREVENT Coordinator for the Department for Education covering the East Midlands since 2013) got around to saying when he attended an event hosted by the Henry Jackson Society last year. This is because PREVENT’s stated objective is to work to “mitigate any danger of extreme or intolerant speech”. So, one might have expected that Slack might have had some critical words to direct at the Henry Jackson Society; although, to be honest, given the widely regarded Islamophobic nature of the government’s failing PREVENT strategy, such criticism seems unlikely.³⁸

³⁷ Gillian Kane and Cole Parke, “Pernicious work of World Congress of Families fuels anti-LGBTQ sentiment,” *Guardian*, November 19, 2015.

³⁸ For further details of PREVENT’s failures and actual promotion of Islamophobia as outlined in the Islamophobic press itself, see “Most programmes to stop radicalisation are failing,” *The Times*, June 6, 2018.

The Islamophobia of Both Tommy Robinson and the Government's PREVENT Strategy

- October 12, 2018

On Thursday night the BBC's flagship news program, *Newsnight*, made yet another contribution towards the growth of far-extremism by taking another 'balanced' look at the life and times of a far-right thug known as Tommy Robinson. In the interest of balance, however, the show outdid itself and even managed to acknowledge how the BBC itself has fuelled the growth of far-right Islamophobic politics. Something they have worked hard on over the years by giving generously of their airtime to such self-promoting and dangerous opportunists like Anjem Choudary and his divisive counterpart Tommy Robinson. Leicester's ever-ubiquitous PREVENT guru Will Baldet was also featured in the *Newsnight* debacle, wherein it seemed that Mr Baldet had belatedly come to the obvious conclusion (that should have been staring him in the face for the past two decades at least) that the far-right is scapegoating Muslims for all the worlds ills. He kindly explained:

What we are seeing now is a more explicitly anti-Muslim movement and certainly when you look at the social media posts, when you look at the language, at the rallies, they're hanging their politics, their ideology, explicitly on an anti-Muslim agenda.

Then when asked, "should we be worried?" about this turn of events, Baldet, a man who is already very concerned about the public's decision to vote for Brexit, replied:

I might be the wrong person to ask. I have quite a pessimistic view about the immediate future. I feel as if common sense has been drowned out and that the platforms are being given over to the extremist ideologues.

It, of course, would never have occurred to Baldet that the mainstream media and the PREVENT strategy (of which he is a central part) might have anything to do with catalysing such problems. This is hardly

surprising as it wasn't so long ago that Baldet was taking to social media to castigate the trade union movement for opposing the government's PREVENT strategy which he did by retweeting supportive articles cherry-picked from right-wing newspapers.

More recently, last month Baldet was busy spinning the truth when, from his position as a senior fellow at the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right, he wrote a blog post to demonstrate that both the far-right and Islamic extremists are united in their attacks upon the PREVENT strategy that he holds so dearly. He was correct on at least one point when he demonstrated the inability of the far-right to stick to any semblance of the truth by writing:

Radical right activism has begun to claim that a policy of state-sponsored indoctrination of Islam in non-Muslim children (via the UK's 'PREVENT' counter terrorism strategy) is taking place and to imply that it's engaged in a plot to facilitate, through ignorance or design, the so-called 'Islamification' of Britain.³⁹

This is patent lunacy, as is Baldet's own confused conclusion in which he states:

I believe the attacks on PREVENT are just a means to an end and that the aim of far-right supporters, and their Islamist extremist counterparts, is to instil fear in their communities and drive a wedge between Government - whose responsibility it is to ensure our children are safe from harm - and the communities themselves.

It is perhaps understandable why Baldet would choose to believe that his employer, the Government, are really concerned with keeping our children and communities safe from harm, but this is wishful thinking in the extreme. Nevertheless, a powerful case has been made many times before (including by Jeremy Corbyn) that it is the Government's PREVENT strategy itself that is causing far more harm than good,

³⁹ Will Baldet, "Taking our children - why Radical Right extremists prey on our deepest human fears," *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right*, September 18, 2018.

especially among the Muslim community. But don't just take my word for it. Why not consider the carefully worded conclusions that were reached in an academic journal article published earlier this year as "Resisting radicalisation: a critical analysis of the UK PREVENT duty." An article that was published in the *Journal for Deradicalization* that, in turn, is published by the prestigious German Institute on Radicalization and De-radicalization Studies. The article which predominately focused on the major problems caused by the roll-out of the PREVENT strategy within educational establishments initially noted that:

Among the plethora of criticisms, three alleged shortcomings are most frequently mentioned: the potentially chilling effect on human rights caused by structural flaws such as the broad definition of 'non-violent extremism'; the discriminatory potential against Islam and, in particular, against Muslim youths; and the paradoxical relationship of the two co-existing statutory duties of 'safeguarding' (i.e. protecting) children 'at risk' and reporting 'risky' children. (pp.158-9)

The critic writes:

The main issue of the PREVENT Duty may just be that it has become counter-productive... Arguably, the PREVENT Duty undermines the educationally envisioned 'inclusive' safe spaces, where students feel safe enough to speak freely and discuss controversial topics. The process by which the PREVENT Duty inhibits these safe spaces is rooted in its potential to infringe on human rights, predominantly on the right to freedom of expression. (p.179)

This leads the author to the logical conclusion that:

The PREVENT Duty in educational institutions is deeply flawed in its implementation, and may have significant potential to further alienate and radicalise the British Muslim population. (p.182)

How the Far-Right Can Be Defeated

- October 13, 2018

The rise in far-right political forces across the world, whether that be in Britain, America, or Brazil,⁴⁰ ultimately owes a great debt of gratitude to the unwillingness of capitalist politicians – whether they be of Conservative or Social Democratic ilk – to prioritise the needs of ordinary people before those of big business. This capitalist problem can be viewed in many ways, but what is abundantly clear is that the mainstream media along with the help of mainstream political parties have all helped to create the social conditions that have allowed far-right radicals to flourish.

Although socialist solutions present the only effective remedy for reversing this toxic state of affairs, this article will however limit itself to drawing upon the ideas presented by some of the blog posts that have been published this year by liberal researchers associated with the recently established Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right. In making this choice, I hope to demonstrate that while liberals fail to offer any meaningful solutions for overcoming the resurgent far-right, they are at least sometimes able to identify some of the underlying reasons for why the far-right are riding a crest to political power across the globe.

Islamophobia is one of the regular staples of far-right scaremongering, and happens to be a form of racism that has been actively encouraged by all manner of political elites for many years. For example, in the year 1997 – in a period of history which Professor Aristotle Kallis refers to as “the time of peak-liberal illusions about the capacity of the new world system to guarantee peace and stability, prosperity and justice, inclusivity and diversity” – he writes that the Runnymede Trust published their “landmark report on Islamophobia [which drew] attention to the then growing threat of anti-Muslim prejudice, discrimination, and violence in western societies.”⁴¹ Twenty years later and nothing much had improved, in fact in many ways

⁴⁰ LSR, “Mobilise to defeat Bolsonaro and re-build a socialist left,” *International Socialist Alternative*, October 11, 2018.

⁴¹ Aristotle Kallis, “Islamophobia, racism and the far-right ... and the right ... and the left ...,” *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right*, April 21, 2018.

things are a whole lot worse. Thus, the Runnymede Trust released a new report on Islamophobia (published in November 2017), which Professor Kallis observed, shows “that increased public awareness and advances in law have not reversed the trend towards intensification, institutionalisation, and normalisation of Islamophobia in contemporary British society.” Dr Paul Stocker agrees with such conclusions:

Britain has become a country not just hospitable to radical-right ideas, but one in which they can thrive... In recent weeks, for example, elite politicians such as Boris Johnson, who may well be Theresa May’s successor as prime minister, have been meeting with key figures in the global radical-right movement such as Steve Bannon and publicly disparaging Muslim women wearing face veils.⁴²

He continues:

The tabloid media speak in aggressive terms about politicians and elites being ‘traitors’ who are betraying ordinary Britons. The Conservative government has not sought to allay the public’s fears over immigration by arguing for its benefits, but instead made outsized promises about its impending cuts following Brexit. Even editorials in center-right magazines such as *The Spectator* have argued that ‘there is *not* nearly enough *Islamophobia* within the Conservative Party,’ while *The Times* has published headlines of late such as ‘Our timid leaders can learn lessons from strongmen.’

The more politicians, media and writers use their influence to concede ground to the radical right, the more likely their ideas are to be accepted by the public and enter public policy debates. Should that happen, this could have devastating consequences for ethnic minorities, marginalized groups and those seen as ‘the enemy within.’

⁴² Paul Stocker, “Tommy Robinson and the transformation of the British Far Right,” *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right*, September 22, 2018.

On the issue of the media, it is clear that tabloids like *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail* have been keen to profit from the racist bile of columnists like Katie Hopkins, a problem that is well-documented by Dr Chris Allen.⁴³ But so-called prestigious newspapers have also played a critical role in nurturing far-right ideologies of hate and division, as issue that Dr Allen took up in a second blog post:

In a recent article in the *Sunday Times*, journalist Andrew Gilligan claimed the [far-right] Generation Identity (GI) movement in Britain was looking to ‘rebrand’ the radical right and thereby ‘normalize’ its extremist ideology and views. While acknowledging this fact, Gilligan’s article gave scant attention to the extremist views GI espouse. Somewhat more bizarrely, Gilligan instead focused upon the backgrounds and fashion of those currently leading Britain’s GI movement. Describing them as ‘hipster fascists,’ the article attracted criticism online and across social media. And rightly so, given how the article trivialized the very real danger and threat posed by GI and the radical right milieu more widely. In fact, the article’s somewhat flippant tone, and emphasis upon fashion seemed to contribute toward exactly what GI was hoping to achieve: stripping away any sense that they posed a very real threat, in preference to making GI and its supporters sound dangerously ‘normal.’⁴⁴

Dr Allen explains that such articles and representations in the mainstream media are highly problematic, as:

Far from conveying the message that radical right activists are without doubt extremists, they instead convey a message of acceptability. Likewise, focusing upon such trivial issues as the style, clothes or brands worn position movements and their supporters in contexts that fail to acknowledge them as highly politicized actors. Embracing issues normally attributed to celebrity culture not only trivializes them, but could also result

⁴³ Chris Allen, “Katie Hopkins: ‘celebrity’ extremist of the radical right?,” *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right*, October 13, 2018.

⁴⁴ Chris Allen, “‘Hipster fascists’: the normalization of the radical right isn’t just happening in America,” *RANTT*, July 30, 2018.

in those who would not normally be attracted to the radical right wanting to know more.

The embrace of far-right talking points by mainstream politicians, as Dr William Allchorn points out, is exemplified by the Conservative Party's "nativist shift under Theresa May's leadership."⁴⁵ Likewise, Dr James Downes draws attention to the way that centre right parties across Europe have now "adopt[ed] hard-line positions on immigration," warning that...

...by shifting further right on immigration, centre right parties may have opened up a 'Pandora's box' and brought the ideology of the far-right into the political mainstream. Thus, we argue that a paradox may have taken place in twenty-first century European party politics. This strategy may benefit the centre right in the short-term, but conceivably aid the radical right more in the long-term.⁴⁶

Sadly, this is not a problem that is unique to centre right parties but is one that plagues centre left parties too — as demonstrated in Britain by the divisive politics of New Labour politicians (past and present). The wide-spread nature of such political cowardice is further thrown into light by the comments of Dr Mette Wiggen who argues that:

Nativism is the norm in much of Europe, where dual welfarism and welfare chauvinism is policy. Nativist rhetoric and ideology has trickled down from radical right politicians to the mainstream and has become the new normal. The days are gone when the welfare state was supported as a safety net for those who needed it the most, or because everyone would need it in the later stages of life.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ William Allchorn, "After the UK 2018 elections, the radical right looks to the future with anger," *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right*, July 22, 2018.

⁴⁶ James Downes, "Opening up Pandora's Box? How Centre Right Parties can outperform the Far Right," *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right*, September 16, 2018.

⁴⁷ Mette Wiggen, "Welfare chauvinism and the 'hostile environment' for

On the issue of British mainstream politicians' Dr Wiggen therefore concludes:

The demonisation of people who depend upon welfare – especially the poor and immigrants – has become the norm in Britain today. The language used by the media and politicians, previously deployed by anti-welfare campaigners on the radical right, has become all too normalised. Long gone are the times when welfare was seen to be a right needed at certain points in life. With the legitimisation of the radical right across Europe, the criminalisation of people who, on occasion, need welfare payments is now the norm.

In a separate article Dr Wiggen then reminds his readers of the tragic day in 2011 when “77 people lost their lives at the hands of a Norwegian right-wing extremist, Anders Behring Breivik.”⁴⁸ In this massacre most of the victims were young Labour Party (Arbeiderpartiet, AP) activists but Dr Wiggen maintains that even after this tragic event politics has continued to move “in a negative direction” and he is clear that:

AP politicians, despite being the target of hatred, need to share responsibility with other political parties. Despite the promises made by the prime minister in 2011, there has never been a collective political strategy to come to terms with the fact that Norwegian society had produced the killer. The ideology he promoted was and is now even more accepted and promoted, especially on social media, by radical-right activists, including ministers of the current [so-called centre right] government.

Dr Wiggen states:

Norwegian politicians have not dealt with, or intervened, to undermine the racist ideology that made the terrorist attacks

immigration,” *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right*, May 2, 2018.

⁴⁸ Mette Wiggen, “Norway has failed to combat a climate of hate,” *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right*, August 2, 2018.

possible. The mainstream political parties are too concerned with winning elections and pandering to a section of the electorate that is influenced by racist propaganda and Islamophobia.

This may be no different from other European countries where the radical right is gaining power and influence, including Italy, Austria and the even more extreme Hungary and Poland. Hatred and fear are being produced and reproduced online, despite the prime minister saying the government is now prioritizing action against hate speech on social media. Trying to curb hate speech on social media is futile when those in power are using it themselves.

What is needed to tackle such systemic problems are systemic solutions. As revolutionary socialist April Ashley explains:

The Socialist Party has successfully campaigned for a strategy of mobilising local communities and trade unions, with effective stewarding to keep people safe in order to counter organisations of the far right. It cannot be left to the police to protect demonstrators. The police have been used to kettle, snatch, beat and intimidate student and anti-racist demonstrators.

Crucially, we call for the building of an anti-racist workers' movement that fights for jobs, for council homes, for pay, benefits and decent public services. For example, in the 2017 Barts hospitals strike of cleaners and porters in east London, Socialist Party members played a leading role in uniting migrant workers alongside British workers in a militant trade union action against privateer employer Serco.

The far right can be defeated by a mass campaign. It is essential that a workers', anti-racist, anti-austerity movement is built, and that trade unions and Jeremy Corbyn do all they can to lead that.

Genuine socialists have always sought to unite the working-class in their fight-back against the far-right, and the momentous "Battle of

Cable Street” of October 1936 has, as Professor Dan Stone notes, “been annually commemorated as one of the most significant moment in the fight against fascism in Britain.”⁴⁹ But, as Professor Stone points out in blog post for the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right, we should never forget the successes from the many other street battles that have been organised by working-class communities against fascists. Here he draws attention to the confrontation that took place in September 1933 in Stockton-on-Tees in “what was perhaps the first major organised anti-fascist demonstration in the UK”. Professor Stone therefore correctly concludes that:

The Battle of Stockton deserves to be commemorated both as a significant event in its own right, as a crucial moment in the history of anti-fascism in Britain, and, vitally, as a reminder of battles perhaps yet to come in these febrile times.

Government PREVENT Apologist, Will Baldet, Opposes Democracy Live on Television

- February 6, 2019

Last night Britain’s leading apologist for the government’s divisive PREVENT strategy, Will Baldet, once again showed his contempt for democracy when he mangled the truth live on *Channel 4’s* evening news program. Mr Baldet chose to misrepresent the truth, in order to belittle the validity of two democratic votes that had led to both education workers and students deciding to oppose the PREVENT strategy. Mr Baldet made his unfortunate comments after Labour MP Naz Shah had drawn attention to the fact that both the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the National Union of Students (NUS) had criticised the PREVENT strategy. The patronising government apologist therefore responded by saying:

The NUT had to redo their votes, recount their votes because

⁴⁹ Dan Stone, “Remembering the ‘Battle of Stockton’,” *Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right*, September 15, 2018.

it was so close. The NUS did not even vote, they just passed the motion because they ran out of time.. [And] even the Labour Shadow Minister has praised PREVENT as first class.

So, let's set a few matters straight. First of all, in 2016 the NUT did undertake a democratic vote at their national conference, and did decide to democratically oppose the PREVENT strategy. There was however no recount because Mr Baldet is mistaken. Mr Baldet was probably thinking of a similar vote that was passed by the University and College Union (UCU) at their 2016 annual conference. In this instance there was a recount of the UCU vote, but exactly what is Mr Baldet trying to imply by making his point? Does he think that for a democratic decision to be meaningful it has to be backed by a super-majority of delegates? This is complete nonsense. A democratic vote was taken, and a motion was successfully passed in the best traditions of trade union democracy.

Mr Baldet then added that the NUS “did not even vote” when it came to opposing the PREVENT strategy. But to date, neither he (nor any of his friends in government) have presented any public evidence that backs up this strange claim. This is because he is wrong. And finally, when Mr Baldet states that Labour's Shadow Minister for Security has praised the PREVENT strategy as “first class”, which is more than a little misleading. This is because the Shadow Minister most definitely did not praise the entire PREVENT strategy as being first class, instead he said that “the quality of some [PREVENT] schemes in analysing fake news, and language that provokes a particular type of reaction, that I have seen, has been first-class.”

Andy Burnham's Lockdown Blame Game Moment

- August 3, 2020

Stoking racist tensions is a longstanding game played by capitalist politicians of all political persuasions; and as we have seen throughout this pandemic, seemingly nothing will put them off from their efforts to divide the working-class. Rather, with the escalation of the crisis shaking their already faltering exploitative political and economic system to its very foundations, many politicians have seized upon this crisis to intensify their own hate-speech.

In Britain this grotesque spectacle is currently being played out; last month when it was announced that Leicester would be the only city going back into a tight lockdown, blame for our city's outbreak was quickly shifted onto issues of ethnicity. As if this was not bad enough when it was pointed out that the outbreaks might be linked to workers being forced to slave away in the hundreds of sweatshops that make up Leicester's textile industry this idea was quickly swept aside by our Blairite City Mayor Sir Peter Soulsby.⁵⁰

Now that large parts of the North West have been forced to accept a further 'lockdown' you might have thought that Andy Burnham, the Labour Mayor of Greater Manchester, would have been prepared for navigating the racial blame game that was likely to intensify in his region. But he betrayed his electorate at the very first hurdle.

On the morning of Eid (July 31) Burnham laid the blame for new lockdown on not just young people but as he put it "gatherings in households across the board, gatherings in multi-generational households, that I think is the reason why this action is justified... its gatherings in homes that has been the problem". The interviewer on BBC Radio 4 then highlighted that others had said that the coronavirus "affects everyone, rich or poor, old or young" and asked Burnham if "when you refer to crowded households you refer to multi-generational households, you do mean predominately the Asian

⁵⁰ Michael Barker, "Why lockdown-Leicester is 'Angry, frustrated and disappointed but frankly not surprised'," *Thoughts of a Leicester Socialist*, July 17, 2020.

population of Greater Manchester don't you?" To which Burnham replied: "Yes I do mean that."⁵¹

Burnham had even been primed by the journalist to think about issues of wealth and how that might effect transmission, which of course it does, but instead Burnham chose to stick to the Tories own talking-point about their concerns with household transmission. Incidentally, this is what Leicester's City Mayor did too when he refused to emphasise socio-economic issues relating to workplace exploitation in his explanations of the viruses spread.

In the context of the North West lockdown this then led to a local Tory MP claiming in an interview conducted on LBC Radio just an hour later that some "sections of our community that are not taking the pandemic seriously." When asked by the interviewer if he was referring to the Muslim community, he replied: "Of course... it is the BAME communities that are not taking this seriously enough."

This divisive nonsense was later correctly criticised by Burnham, "who said it was "never a good idea, ever, to make sweeping generalisations about your constituents, but it is a particularly poor idea to single out a single community within your community for such comments".⁵² "I don't think those [MP's] comments are helpful at all" Burnham added, but the damage has already been done by his own sweeping generalisations.

But what is clear is that the deadly spread of Covid-19 exacts a much higher death among BAME communities, and it is not spreading amongst certain communities because of ethnicity but precisely because of their relative poverty. Later in the afternoon this phenomena was well-explained by Professor Dominic Harrison, who is the public health director for Blackburn with Darwen, who pointed out that the towns where the latest lockdown measures were introduced were towns...

⁵¹ Alex Hudson, "British politicians blame migrants and ethnic minorities for COVID-19 spike," *Newsweek*, July 31, 2020.

⁵² Niall Griffiths, "Andy Burnham condemns Tory MP's claims that Muslim and BAME communities aren't taking Covid-19 seriously," *Manchester Evening News*, July 31, 2020.

...which have more economic and social challenges. And our research on who is being infected in the last ten-day period in Blackburn and Darwen has shown us that 33% of all the confirmed cases in Blackburn and Darwen were amongst the least wealthy 10%, and amongst the most wealth 10% of our residents we have had no cases at all. And so one of the things that we observed from that is that the virus - and this was confirmed incidentally by the Office of National Statistics in relation to deaths earlier in the pandemic - is that those who have high levels of deprivation, high levels of unequal and unfair life chances are certainly being more impacted by this virus, and in terms of the narrative, it is very clear that that's not because they are necessarily not social distancing, it's probably because they are finding that their employment conditions, particularly because many are in front-line roles exposes them to more risk of being infected in the first place. And so we need to be very cautious about how we explain the causes of higher rates in these northern towns because to the best of my knowledge there is no evidence that that pattern is any greater in the northern towns than in England as a whole, and what's therefore driving our increased risk of transmission is our increased risk exposure which is generally driven by higher levels of inequality and exposure to risk. (BBC Lancashire, July 31)

This is not a new or complicated argument and so Andy Burnham has no excuses for not being able to immediately respond to such issues in the media, instead of very belatedly in the relative obscurity of *The Observer* (July 2).⁵³ Maybe the influence of Sir Keir Starmer's new leadership of the Labour Party is already having a detrimental impact on Burnham's willingness to promote socialism. To take just one example we should remember that under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership Burnham was had been particularly outspoken against the ongoing scapegoating of the Muslim community especially in 2016 when he called for the scrapping for the "toxic" PREVENT strategy - a strategy which was meant to counter extremism but only ever served to demonise Muslims and generate problems. Although after getting

⁵³ Andy Burnham, "Expect more lockdowns until low-paid workers are able to isolate without fear of poverty," *The Observer*, July 2, 2020.

elected as Mayor his commitment to scrapping the government's so-called anti-terror strategy quickly evaporated and he now supports this toxic project.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the case for ditching PREVENT has never been greater. In fact, only last month an important study was published that once again demonstrated how the PREVENT strategy has reinforced negative stereotypes of Muslims making a solid case for why it should be scrapped with immediate effect.⁵⁵ But as with the pandemic itself the government has consistently ignored any evidence that contradicts their self-serving needs, and as far as the Tories are concerned, they “need” to demonise Muslims! That is why we need to fight to rid ourselves of the Tories, and we can do that by fighting back within our workplaces and on the streets.

Commenting on the politics of the Tories latest lockdown mayhem, even the *British Medical Journal* has gone beyond the Labour Party's leadership in ridiculing the government. In an article published on the day of the Eid celebrations, Manchester GP Siema Iqbal told *the Journal* that the government's announcement created only confusion and...

... seems to suggest that blame incorrectly lies at the south Asian communities. This completely ignores the fact that actually many have adhered to the rules, but due to social deprivation and overcrowded housing it means risk of transmission is higher, especially if two families mix as part of a social bubble.⁵⁶

In a similar vein Hina Shahid, chair of the Muslim Doctors Association, said there is “an overwhelming feeling in BAME

⁵⁴ “Positives in Andy Burnham's commission's PREVENT report overshadowed by greater concerns,” *MEND*, August 2, 2018.

⁵⁵ Matthew Guest *et al.*, “Islam and Muslims on UK University Campuses: perceptions and challenges,” Durham: Durham University, London: SOAS, Coventry: Coventry University and Lancaster: Lancaster University, 2020.

⁵⁶ Elisabeth Mahase, “Covid-19: Tighter restrictions imposed in the north of England as cases spike,” *British Medical Journal*, July 31, 2020.

communities that we are being scapegoated for systematic government failings in handling the crisis.” As if this was not bad enough Shahid “said that her association had also written multiple policy briefings and letters to the government to ‘highlight the structural inequalities, discrimination, and racism that are the main drivers for covid-19 transmission,’ but had received no response.”

Again, none of this should be novel to anyone concerned with fighting back against exploitation and oppression. For example, earlier last month Shahid wrote an impassioned evidence-based opinion-piece for the *British Medical Journal* where she capably laid out the problems facing Britain’s Muslim community.⁵⁷ She highlighted how Muslims have the highest age standardised mortality rate, drew attention to high levels of deprivation facing the Muslim community, their demonisation by both politicians and the mainstream media, and reminded her readers how “over 50% of doctors who have died in the UK have been Muslim, despite constituting 9.1% of the medical workforce.”

Yet Andy Burnham when responding to the Tories latest lockdown chose to ignore all these facts and settled for echoing the government’s divisive narrative on the pandemic. The manner in which the Tories have mismanaged this crisis – at every turn – meant that the introduction of localised lockdowns provided the perfect opportunity for Burnham to challenge their absolute failure to protect us, the working-classes, from the ravages of this pandemic.

Socialist Alternative (the group of which I am a member) believe the working-class need class fighters who will organise to dismantle this deeply oppressive, racist, sexist, violent, utterly bankrupt system of capitalism.⁵⁸ What we do not need are so-called political representatives who are not willing to oppose the Tories racist deceptions at every opportunity, our class deserves no less.

⁵⁷ Hina Shahid and Salman Waqar, “Covid-19 and ethnic minority communities—we need better data to protect marginalised groups,” *British Medical Journal*, July 7, 2020.

⁵⁸ Kshama Sawant, “Tax Amazon victory speech,” *Socialist Alternative (US)*, July 7, 2020.

How Leicester City Council and the Police Undermined Anti-Racist Activism When the EDL Came to Town

- April 8, 2021

In 2010 the racist thugs that called themselves the English Defence League (EDL) descended upon Leicester to spout their lies and hate. During that first visit they succeeded in breaking free from their designated static protest that had been surrounded by the police (as the EDL had promised to do) which enabled them to rampage violently through our city's streets.

Having had some degree of success in evading the police in 2010, two years later the EDL planned another visit to Leicester. This time the Council allowed them to march right through the heart of our city while simultaneously restricting the movement of anti-racist protestors.⁵⁹ As one legal observer reported:

You had to wonder at and yet be extremely concerned about mass kettling and the suspension of rights to free assembly and movement on 4 February 2012 in Leicester. The police used their extensive public order powers to limit the right of people to protest against the EDL marching through the centre. From

⁵⁹ Just a handful of Leicester's Labour councillors supported the Unite Against Fascism (UAF) counterprotests, these included Patrick Kitterick and Ross Willmott. While these councillors were correct in opposing the Council's decision to let the EDL march right through the heart of the city, it should be said that Cllr Willmott was incorrect to argue that the EDL should be banned from marching; this is because such actions would legitimise the use of such bans against workers' organisations.

The fight for socialism has always been central to the fight against fascism and the far-right. And in order to build successful mass movements against fascist threats, workers have often sought to form united fronts of class-based resistance. Here we should be clear though: capitalist exploiters who enforce austerity upon the working-class have no place in united fronts. This is why many Marxists (like myself) remain critical of the organising strategies adopted by Unite Against Fascism. For more on this, see Michael Barker, "How 'Unite Against Fascism' doesn't even meet the SWP's own definition of a united front," *Thoughts of a Leicester Socialist*, November 19, 2018.

where I stood (kettled) EDL marchers could wander without hindrance in the city centre, making gestures of defiance and enjoying the protection of the police. This was business as usual in Leicester; the EDL free to march and the new mayor and Leicestershire Constabulary acquiescing to its demands and allowing its members free rein to march through the city.

...Legal observers witnessed countless incidents where local young Muslims were moved on, stopped and searched and in some cases apparently hurt. Young men from St Matthews and Highfields (the main BME areas of the city) were involved in skirmishes with the police in Abbey Park where dogs were set on them. According to Netpol, ‘the actions taken to separate the Muslim population from the EDL were in many cases excessive and may have been counter-productive. The police were perceived as imposing a form of “lockdown” ... and the significant use of force against Muslim youth did much to reinforce this message.’⁶⁰

But even before the day that the EDL arrived in Leicester, the local authorities were doing their best to try to intimidate members of the public from actively opposing the EDL. For example, as part of Operation Staysafe the City Council paid for the distribution of 20,000 leaflets (17,000 of which were “dispatched via Royal Mail to households of secondary age children”) that aimed to “dissuade local people from engaging with or taking part in lawful marches and assemblies on 4th February.”⁶¹

These leaflets “made it clear that any young person attending the demonstrations on the 4th February may be picked up by the

⁶⁰ Saqib Deshmukh, “Business as usual,” *Institute of Race Relations*, June 15, 2012.

⁶¹ “Report on the policing of the English Defence League and Counter Protests in Leicester on 4th February 2012,” *Netpol*, December 2012. The Netpol report points out that: “Operation Stay Safe made use of powers granted to the police by Section 46 of the Children Act 1998. This allows the police to take into police protection children who are at risk of ‘significant harm’ due to a lack of parental care or control. The provisions are meant to apply in situations where children are putting themselves in positions where they could be exploited or abused.”

police. They would then be held for their own protection, to be released into the care of a parent or guardian.” However, this threat of arrest was only intended to keep people from coming to the city centre, because as on the day that the EDL came to town Operation Staysafe was not implemented. Hence Operation Staysafe “was intentionally used as a form of ‘scare tactic’, a strategy which [Netpol] consider[ed] highly questionable if not unlawful.” The Network for Police Monitoring (Netpol) go on to note that:

The leaflet made no reference to the rights of people to lawfully demonstrate in Leicester, or to go about their personal business in the city. The leaflet also suggested that people mobilising for demonstrations, including those mobilising to protest against the presence of the EDL may have underhand motives. It does not appear to us appropriate for the police or local authority to be passing comment in such circumstances on the motivations of those organising or promoting lawful political activity.

On top of these anti-democratic measures to undermine effective protests, the Council helped organise a number of “distraction activities” on February 4th. These distraction activities included establishing football tournaments and running various political discussion groups which included a “debate about race” that was held at the RAWDA Cultural Centre; events which were timed to take place while the protests were taking place.⁶²

⁶² Similar distraction tactics were employed by the City Council in advance of the EDL’s visit to Leicester in 2010. When discussing the two planned static protests (one by the EDL and the other by Unite Against Fascism) Chief Inspector Richard Keenan and Sergeant Steve O’Neill “reported on the work that the police had been doing”. Apparently “Extensive work had been done to try to discourage young people from getting involved such as additional activities.” Council officials also noted that “People were being discouraged from counter-protest on the day and instead asked to support two events on Friday and Sunday which had been organised in conjunction with Hope Not Hate.” “A representative from Hope Not Hate explained the events that were being held on Friday and Monday as an alternative to protesting on Saturday.” (Leicester City Council minutes from “Your Community, Your Voice”

Making matters worse, on the day the EDL's visit the only people to be attacked by the police (including by a police dog) and the only people to be charged at by police horses were anti-racist protestors; and "police records show that ALL of those stopped searched were of Asian ethnic origin." As Netpol pointed out:

The actions of the police created a strong sense of resentment, as young people felt they were being excluded from their own city while the anti-Islamic EDL were free to come and go as they pleased. The police were perceived as imposing a form of 'lockdown' as they effectively designated the entire city centre as a 'no-go zone' for Muslim youth. The strong police presence on the edges of Muslim areas, the focus of stop and search on Asian men and the significant use of force against Muslim youth did much to reinforce this message.

In order to keep anti-racist campaigners penned into their own communities a "large police presence was maintained on the boundaries of the city centre and the St Matthews area." Here "Somali and Asian youths congregating here in the early afternoon were held back by cordons as police attempted to prevent them from going into the city centre."

Communal Violence in Leicester

- October 8, 2022

The mainstream media serve the needs of the powerful, this much is obvious: as such they can rarely be relied upon to explain the way in which the ruling-class dominate ordinary people on a daily basis. Mainstream reporting on the recent outbreak of violence on the streets of Leicester affirms this point, as the media and local politicians have generally proved unwilling to explain what happened and why. All the same it is still possible (but not easy) to piece together what happened in Leicester by relying upon mainstream reporting, which is something that this essay sets out to do.

According to a BBC radio report (broadcast on October 4) “the first major incident [of violence in Leicester that was] investigated by the police was in May”.⁶³ This incident occurred late in the evening of May 22 and involved a gang of around twenty Hindu men violently setting upon a young Muslim man. Now, four months on from this attack, on October 3, the Leicestershire police finally posted the following formal appeal for witnesses on their web site:

An investigation is continuing after an 18-year-old man was injured during an incident in Harewood Street, Leicester, in May this year.

Officers were called to a report of a group of men fighting in the area during the early hours of Sunday 22 May. An 18-year-old man was assaulted during the incident. The victim, who is now 19, reported he had been punched and kicked to the face and head and had a glass bottle thrown at him. The victim was taken to hospital following the incident and has since been discharged.

A number of enquiries remain ongoing into the report including taking witness statements and checking CCTV. Officers also remain in contact with the victim and his family.

⁶³ “Leicester:behind the divide,” *BBC Radio 4*, October 4, 2022.

A 28-year-old man has also been voluntarily interviewed in connection with the incident.⁶⁴

The following day an article based upon this police appeal was then featured in a report carried by the *Leicester Mercury* (“Teenager punched and kicked and bottle thrown at head”). The only new bit about this otherwise old news was that a 28-year-old man had been interviewed in relation to the attack, although according to another article in the *Mercury* this interview took place on the same day as the attack.⁶⁵ As it turns out the incident in question had already been belatedly covered in detail by BBC Radio Leicester (on September 8) when the local reporter, Ben Jackson, had interviewed the mother of the young man who had been attacked. She recounted the details of the attack in the following way:

Back in May now, my son was coming back from work, and he noticed that a young lad, no older than 13 or 14, was actually getting mugged in the street, so my son decided he would go around and check up on him. And so, he drove around and at this point this child was on his own, and he rolled down his window and he said ‘are you alright, I have just seen what happened?’ and the boy just kind of backed away... My son then got out of his car, and he walked towards him... and it was almost like he was led to this dead-end street, and out of nowhere with no warning, so many people come out of the alleyways and parked cars, and they have all come out armed, ready.

They approached him and the first thing they said to him was ‘are you a Muslim?’ He said, ‘yes, I am a Muslim, but I don’t know the bloke, I don’t know what’s wrong, I am just checking up on him,’ but even before he could finish talking, they went straight for him. They just attacked him, head and face, head and face. They had him on the floor, kicking him in his face.

⁶⁴ “Investigation continuing following incident in Harewood Street, Leicester,” *Leicestershire Police*, October 2022.

⁶⁵ Shannen Headley, “In full: The latest arrests which bring total connected to violence and disorder in east Leicester to 55,” *Leicester Mercury*, September 30, 2022.

They took poles and alcohol bottles and smashed them across his face and his head, and he got up and they got him back down again, and we are talking nineteen-plus people were there, and there were loads of them just on top of him, and they wouldn't let him go. And when he finally did get up, he ran for his life, and his words exactly to me were 'mum, I was just running and I couldn't see anything, but I could hear them coming,' and so he was fearing for his life.

When he finally got up and ran, he ran to his friend's house which was the safest place he could go to, and luckily when he came banging on the door his friend's brother opened the door. And as he opened the door, they went for him again and smashed more bottles on his head. They punched the brother, his friend's brother, and it just went crazy. He said he didn't know what happened. They were in the house now, and the parents had come out the house, thinking what is all this commotion going on, and tried to reason with them, saying what's happening and they didn't even give them a chance to talk they went straight for the parents as well. Even the father has a mark across the back of his neck where a pole hit him; it was awful. They threw loads of alcohol bottles through the house, and literally trashing the place in the house... and by this point people were coming in cars, pulling up in cars, they were already armed and coming for them. And then when they realised they had no more glass bottles or anything left they decided to run. They ran in the opposite direction. At the time [my son] was so out of it he couldn't even talk. He was in a state of shock, his injuries were horrific.

The BBC journalist then asked the mother what happened after the police became involved and she said:

Initially the police were called because of the incident but because of the state of my son's injuries they couldn't take a statement from him. But a week had gone by now and they had still not come for a statement. No support, or not even a phone call to ask how he was doing. And then a week had gone by and by this point everyone in the family were all getting together, friends were getting together CCTV images

together to try to track down these people, trying to get the best possible images so we could hand these to the police. But as time had gone on, we had realised that it was a racial attack because the first thing they had said to him was ‘are you a Muslim?’ before they went for him. And when they followed him to his friend’s house, the same thing was said ‘are you a Muslim?’ and then they went for them. And I thought that this was really important to let the police know, so I tried to contact the police and I couldn’t get hold of the police officer for ages with messages and emails, and finally she did contact me and were very abrupt like he was an adult and we can’t speak to the parent anyway.

When asked if she felt like she “had a good service from the police? Do you feel that you have been supported?” The mother replied:

Not at all. Not at all. We’ve had no contacts, no updates, no nothing. Most recently in the last month, just over a month ago [so sometime in early August], my son was called in to ID them, and he pointed them out, both of them pointed them out. So, we’ve ID’d them, and we heard nothing back from [the police]. My son actually rang the police officers to speak to them and left emails and messages, but it was only last night that I asked him, have you back from any of them? And he said no mum, I still not heard back from them.

Some months later, on August 28, India then beat Pakistan in the Asia Cup, and ensuing racial provocations (including chanting calling for “death to Pakistan”) served as a trigger that precipitated further violence. Hence on September 8, the aforementioned BBC report began by noting how:

The last few days have seen parts of the city come under some scenes of some violent disturbances as there have been growing tensions in and around the Spinney Hills area of the city. Leicestershire police have issued dispersal orders for Belgrave, Spinney Hills, and Highfields following a series of disturbances. The orders allow officers to return anyone under the age of 16 to their home address.

Well, the recent disorders seem to have started on the Golden Mile last week when India beat Pakistan in cricket in the Asia Cup, but one Leicester mum says it has nothing to do with cricket. Her son was attacked back in May when he was set upon by around twenty youths. It is important to mention that these separate incidents haven't formally been linked.

Six days later, on September 14, local MP for Leicester East, Claudia Webbe, wrote to Leicestershire police's Acting Police Constable Rob Nixon wherein she warned:

I note that violent incidents were... reported on Friday 9 September, with at least two people arrested as a result. There are also allegations that hate towards specific nationalities, race and/or religions and antisocial behaviour predates the Asia Cup, by possibly several months, which implies that tensions in the community may be more long standing and not narrowly [referring to the May attack] related to the India v Pakistan cricket tournament.

I understand that the days that followed have been reported as more "settled", which implies that the conclusion of the Asia Cup has eased tensions for the time being. Nevertheless, I am also aware of the risk of escalation if community tensions increase. There are reports of incitement to hate being targeted at those of Muslim or Hindu faith, which is being shared on social media to cause fear, intimidation and disunity. I was therefore concerned to learn of "fake" social media post, circulating in places like Facebook and via WhatsApp designed to "entrap" member of the local community to attend a protest sparked by hate. In one particular post, it was billed as a "peaceful protest" "against Muslim hate crime" with a meeting point in Belgrave. All of which was entirely fake and hateful and which was intent on causing unnecessary alarm, fear and distress.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ As the BBC report (October 4) noted: "The following week [after India beat Pakistan at cricket] there was a report of an egg being thrown at a Ganesh statue, a popular and revered Indian deity. For Hindus who have to be vegetarian inside a temple, it's an act that considered to be as offensive as

Irrespective of whether the police believed that tensions were now settling, the subsequent decision taken by the Rob Nixon to allow many of his police officers to take their first day leave for weeks on Saturday September 17 was a massive mistake. This was one of the reasons why there were only eight police officers available on the scene when a crowd of 300 masked-up Hindu nationalists insisted on undertaking a long two-and-a-half-mile 'peace' march from Belgrave to North Evington while chanting slogans firmly associated with the type of anti-Muslim pogroms that are undertaken in India.

To correct the widespread belief that the police had not done anything to stop this extremely provocative march, a few days after the outbreak of communal violence on September 17 the Leicestershire Police (ie., Rob Nixon) released a statement which explained:

There was no direct intelligence relating to the volume of people who were going to mobilise early on Saturday. My officers were dispatched in order to try to engage and seek co-operation. They were confronted by in excess of 300 people and there were eight officers at the time. They did the best they could in the circumstances by staying with them until more officers could arrive. That is what videos on social media show. Two arrests were made later. Separately, earlier in the day, officers had dealt with a small group who had posted on social media that they planned to come to Leicester from Birmingham. Protests need advance notification and none was given.

Yet here even this public statement makes it clear that the police force knew something was going to happen on the day that the largest outbreak of violence in Leicester kicked off, as Nixon affirms that he

throwing pork into a mosque. The next day there was another assault on a Muslim man. As news of this latest attack spread, young Muslim men took to the streets. There were reports of eggs being thrown at Hindu houses and large numbers of youths damaging cars. Police began daily patrols of the area to stop groups gathering. Community leaders called for calm, but tensions continued to simmer. Then on Saturday Sept 17 a group of around 300 mainly young Hindu men marched to Green Lane Road where there are many Muslim owned businesses. There was a tense stand-off and sporadic outbreaks of violence.”

knew that people were mobilising from far-away to congregate in Leicester on September 17. So, the question remains, why did the police choose to be understaffed on that Saturday of all days?

Either way, it is apparent that the toxic ideologies associated with the far-right Hindu nationalist government of India have played an important role in fueling Leicester's outbreak of communal tensions.⁶⁷ But unfortunately, a common narrative played out in the mainstream media has been that the violence can be traced to new immigrants to our city. Rob Nixon seems to concur with this view, and so when interviewed by the BBC he said:

Well, I think you have to go back before the marches: I think there is also a perception that there has been an influx of people who have arrived in the area over the last few years and they arrived and we were very quickly locked down because of Covid, and then you've got the post-Covid impact when people went out socialising and doing various different things, and I think there is a sense that that has brought different sections of communities into conflict because of potentially a lack of social and cultural respect for one another. And then that has led to some increased tensions.

There has been some conflict over territory, and a genuine sense of territorial entitlement. So, I think it would be oversimplistic to say that it's just a falling out of two different faiths, I think the other thing we have to factor in here is that there is a general movement of some of the younger people finding voice via social media and potentially moving away from the traditional leadership and faith-based leaders within the community, and trying to get influence from elsewhere.

Yasmin Surti, who is the Secretary of the Federation of Muslim Organisations in Leicester, made similar points when speaking to the BBC, explaining:

⁶⁷ Lee Garrett, "Professor says Leicester's civil unrest 'affects the whole city' as investigations into violence continue," *Leicester Mercury*, September 30, 2022.

What we have here is a fairly new community to the city, from a part of India which is very different from our mainstream communities, that have established themselves in Leicester... [from a] very different culture, who probably arrived in the last eight to ten years or so.... This is not about this whole new community, it is within a section of a section of them, so a very small minority of young men. What had been leading up to the cricket match and beyond was incidents at prayer times, of driving past mosques, shouting, blowing their horns, at prayer time waving Indian flags.

The same talking points were echoed by Cllr Rita Patel and by local Hindu businessman Dharmesh Lakhani, who is the owner of the Indian restaurant Bobby's and a close friend of Leicester's leading BJP supporter Keith Vaz. Here it is important to note that Lakhani, despite running a popular restaurant that is located literally a stone's throw from the Leicester headquarters of the HSS (which is the sister organisation of the Hindutva promoting RSS), was reported as saying to the press that: "We can turn around and apportion blame but the reality is there are extremist ideologies floating around in all communities". Indeed, rather than acknowledge the largely unreported fact that far-right Hindu nationalist ideas have a long pedigree in Leicester, the press reported:

'Social media has played a big part in inflaming the situation' Lakhani said. He said the problems were partly caused by a wave of newer arrivals to the city from the former Portuguese-run enclaves in India of Daman and Diu. By ancestry they had rights to Portuguese passports and migrated to Leicester in significant numbers before the UK left the EU.⁶⁸

Of course, such factors might contribute in some way towards the recent outbreaks of violence, but they do little to explain how the far-right ideologies of the RSS, HSS, and BJP have been largely able to avoid critical scrutiny in the UK. On this point, Professor Gurharpal

⁶⁸ William Wallis, "Leicester's communal violence reverberates across continents," *Financial Times*, September 29, 2022.

Singh, who is presently a visiting fellow at the University of Leicester explained to the BBC how:

We were largely protected from these external events, but now alongside the potential of such events there is a real dynamic of social change in Leicester which is qualitatively different, and this is adding a degree of militancy to inter-religious relations in the city. The promotion of aggressive Hindu nationalism and the idea that you can only be a particular kind of Indian, and this kind of divisive politics will only undermine the strength and unity of these communities and give succor to racist and far-right parties.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Another individual who is interviewed in the same radio broadcast is Professor Chetan Bhatt who explained why new immigrants from India can easily be scapegoated for deeper underlying problems relating to caste and Hindu nationalism:

“They haven’t gone through the process of migration to East Africa and then to Britain. They hadn’t gone through the process of establishing and creating that community, and they face hostility not just because of racism and discrimination, but also forms of prejudice from the already settled and established South Asian communities, and that creates an important and interesting dynamic because those smaller communities that arrive later can often be blamed for problems or social issues, they often come from much poorer regions of Gujarat, and sometimes they also come from castes that are different or sub-castes that are different, and that creates other forms of prejudice. And some of the communities that have come recently from Gujarat come from quite deprived areas and they have suffered economic hardship there and they suffer economic hardship in the UK.”

For an academic discussion of the relationship between caste and immigration, see Roger Ballard, “The South Asian presence in Britain and its transnational connections,” in Bhikhu Parekh, Gurharpal Singh and Steven Vertovec (eds.), *Culture and Economy in the Indian Diaspora* (Routledge, 2003).

A useful BBC article titled “Leicester: Why the violent unrest was surprising to many” (September 24) notes: “The politics of the Indian subcontinent has started to be felt in another way in Leicester since 2014, says Prof Singh, when the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took power in India. The rise of the BJP has fostered a brand of nationalism among the diaspora, he

Local resident and volunteer board member of Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND), Shokhat Adam Patel, had this to say:

Reporters have mentioned that there are new communities arriving in the city. These new communities have been placed into a very congested area, so we must not discount the socio-economic factors in this, it's complex, it is not binary. But unfortunately, there is that elephant in the room. My city has an undercurrent of RSS nationalism appearing repeatedly for the past seven to eight years, blatantly. So, in a city that has been so united there have been cases where I have raised the point several years ago that because we are such a united city, we are a beacon for other cities to follow, we pride ourselves that Leicester is so diverse here. So, we have taken our finger off the pulse, and they say in business that the biggest reason for failure is success: we got a little bit lazy, and we didn't have those uncomfortable conversations.⁷⁰

He then went on to talk about the Belper Street controversy,⁷¹ and then spoke about the 2019 General Election which saw the more conservative parts of Leicester's Hindu community turn against the new Labour MP for Leicester East, Claudia Webbe (the individual who was selected to serve as a socialist replacement for the disgraced BJP-supporting Keith Vaz).⁷² As Patel explained:

says. "The party is popular among Leicester's Gujarati Hindu community which manifests in the outlook and politics of the community."

⁷⁰ Indian American Muslim Council, "#CongressionalBriefing: Hindutva violence against Muslims in England," *Youtube*, September 21, 2022.

⁷¹ Michael Barker, "Keith Vaz and his support of Hindu nationalism," *Thoughts of a Leicester Socialist*, September 26, 2022.

⁷² Michael Barker, "Leicester's 'Labour' Hindu nationalists," *Thoughts of a Leicester Socialist*, October 3, 2022. In May 2019 the then Labour MP for Leicester East, Keith Vaz, had publicly celebrated the electoral victory of India's far-right BJP government, and then in October he had come to the defence of Hindu nationalists again when he sought to undermine the democratic validity of a political motion relating to Kashmir that was passed by his own political party. However, it is also interesting to point out that right at the start of the year Vaz had flown to Daman after the local Damase population in Leicester (which is about 11,000 strong) had raised their

We had a [general] election in this country in 2019. The city and the area where this violence has erupted has been traditionally what we call a Labour seat. So, the Labour Party was in power there for over thirty years. They had a majority of over 25,000. At this latest election, due to the stance that the Labour Party took on the Kashmir issue, for the first time in my city I saw politics being played on the ground of religion. So we had people from the Overseas Friends of BJP canvassing on our doors, we had leaflets coming through our doorsteps saying that if you were to vote for the Labour Party, you are voting for poison, they are the party that supports Muslims, you should vote for the alternative party which is the Conservative Party, who had put in a Hindu MP: and none of these were official documentation I should make very clear, a vote for him was a vote for purity, and a vote for Labour would be a vote for poison. And this was blatant. And this majority was cut down from about 24,000 to about 2,000 [correction: 22,428 to 6,019]. And I was speaking to that community that the lady alluded to, a new community in our city, who are on

concerns with him about the land grabbing activities of Praful K. Patel, the far-right BJP State Administrator for Daman and Diu. This controversy involved Patel “ordering the confiscation of the land and ordering the demolition of homes along the Daman coast to make way for development of the Daman and Diu coastline.” Vaz evidently spoke with Patel, and although Vaz was slightly critical about the home demolitions that had taken place, he maintained that Patel’s ongoing land grabbing activities were coming from a good place. Vaz explained:

“I had a very constructive discussion with Mr. Patel. I believe that Mr. Patel has a vision for Daman and he wants to develop it as a tourist and education centre. I was particularly impressed by the commitments made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in order to enhance the development of Daman.”

However, these warm words for the BJP’s repression did not stop Mr. Patel from carrying out his violent plans (see “Daman – Land and property owned by the fishing communities confiscated and homes demolished”). And to this day Mr. Patel continues to promote the BJP’s Hindu nationalist agenda which in past years has seen him launch a vicious attack on the majority Muslim inhabitants of the island of Lakshadweep (for more on this, see “From Gujarat to Lakshadweep, Praful Patel is following the Hindutva playbook”).

the lowest socio-demographics in this country, who are living with 10-15 people in a house, who are working 14-15 hours a day, who are making ends meet, and the only thing they were saying to me was that we cannot vote for Labour, which is traditionally the working-class party, because they [Labour] support the Muslims and we cannot vote for them.⁷³

In another recent interview that was featured on the Islam Channel, local Labour councillor Kirk Master (who is the former Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Leicestershire) reiterated the same point that the problems in Leicester East were longstanding:

This has been ongoing for months and months and months, and you could even go back years in regard to a number of separate incidents that have happened to individuals; a number of separate incidents that have happened to members of the community; a number of incidents that have happened around faith organisations, some of the temples, some of the gurdwaras, and some of the mosques. So, there is a catalogue of things that have happened over an extended period of time which the community felt haven't been dealt with and haven't been addressed. And then the cricket match occurred, and everyone said it was because of the cricket match, India-Pakistan, but India and Pakistan have been playing cricket for

⁷³ Islamophobic group Insight UK made the following highly selective statement following the 300 strong march that took place on September 17. "The Hindu community has been a target of organised violence in Leicester over the past 20 days. It has suffered at the hands of extremist Muslims who have sought to cause deliberate harm, disruption and fear amongst Leicester's thousands of citizens. On the evening of 17 September, a peaceful protest march by Hindu youths was attacked by radical Islamists with stones and glass bottles. It is obvious from the video footage that this attack was carefully planned to terrorise the Hindu community. Included within the attacks are the Diu-Daman Hindus, a small and marginalised group who are based in the Belgrave and Latimer areas and face various socioeconomic challenges." ("Press Release - civil disorder in Leicester," September 18, 2022.) For a critical introduction to Insight, see Michael Barker, "Insight UK: anti-Muslim disinformation," *Thoughts of a Leicester Socialist*, September 21, 2022.

decades and we have never had this kind of trouble, so it clearly wasn't over one cricket match.⁷⁴

Cllr Master likewise argued that part of the problem relating to the recent violence owed to recent migrants from India with Portuguese passports. He said:

There were some particular incidents around the cricket march as well where members of the Muslim community had been attacked by large groups of a particular community and that obviously escalated things very quickly because they felt vulnerable, they felt frightened. Communities within that particular area also felt that they were under threat, and it wasn't a nice situation, and the police needed to deal with that, and the communities felt that they weren't dealing with that, and they wanted to take control.

But he then went on to wrongly assert that the far-right Hindutva ideologies actually came from these new communities, which is not true as the RSS's sister organisation has been located in Leicester for decades and has even featured in a critical Channel 4 investigation from 2002. (Also see the more recent ITV investigation from 2015 which I reported on here: "The 'ideological commonality' of the far-right RSS and the Leicester-based HSS UK," *Thoughts of a Leicester Socialist*, September 27, 2022.) Ignoring this background Cllr Master thus stated:

Well, the Indian politics that we are talking about in terms of the RSS strand is new here in the city, it's arrived here with these new communities; it's a belief and an ideology that they bring and that they hold.

⁷⁴ "What's the reason behind the Hindu and Muslim tensions in Leicester?," *Islam Channel (Youtube)*, September 23, 2022.

The RSS and the Spread of Hindutva Hate in Leicester

- October 12, 2022

With the recent outbreak of violence in Leicester some commentators (and some racists) have tried to scapegoat recent migrants from the Daman and Diu communities for our city's problems. Such lazy thinking must be categorically opposed; after all it remains a rather uncontroversial fact that far-right Hindutva activists associated with the Indian-based Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) have been spreading their divisive ideology in Leicester and beyond for decades.

One of the main sources of this far-right Hindu nationalism in Leicester has been an organisation which has a headquarters on Loughborough Road (in Belgrave) called the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) UK. And here, a useful overview of the ongoing operations of RSS-linked groups like the HSS has already been provided in Professor Christophe Jaffrelot's book *Religion, Caste and Politics in India* (2010). As Jaffrelot explains:

Like their Indian counterparts, the various components of the British Sangh are in constant contact but strive to mask the links they have with the RSS to avoid being overtly stigmatized by too strong an ideological branding and thereby circumvent the legislation in force. Indeed, the British Charity Commission prohibits the funding of political and sect activities, while section 5 of the Indian Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act of 1976 (FCRA) forbids the RSS and its affiliates from receiving funds from abroad without prior authorization from the central government on a case-by-case basis. It is thus of the utmost importance for the components of the *Sangh Parivar* to distinguish themselves from transnational political movements which would be illegal to fund. Thus, the Press Officer of the NHSEF [National Hindu Students Forum] stated in November 2005 that 'we have no direct link with them [HSS UK]; we are not funded or bonded to them, but there is a moral affiliation as with every other Hindu organization'. (p.700)

He goes on to point out how the Indian-based *Sangh Parivar*, which is the umbrella body that contains the various Hindu nationalist groupings generated by the RSS...

...has managed to reproduce most of its structure abroad, except that the HSS is not at the system's hub: the centre continues to be the RSS. Hindu nationalist movement affiliates either in India or abroad therefore swear allegiance to the same decision-making centre, which certainly makes this movement qualify as a network. Not only do the members of the British Sangh regularly attend events organized by the Indian Sangh, but reports on the RSS activities in India are also presented in meetings of the HSS UK. More importantly, Rajendra Singh, the leader of the RSS from 1994 to 2000, presented his organization's 'Code of guidelines to workers, to HSS members in London on 21 April 1995.'⁷⁵

Diaspora communities, although generally not promoting the same type of violent politics typified by the RSS outside of India, have however been successfully mobilised to fund pogrom supporting groups in India. Professor Jaffrelot adds:

Since [around 1989] the main source of *Sangh* funds has come from abroad, as shown by the 2002 report on the India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF) and the one published in 2004 by the AWAAZ network, a human rights organization in South Asia, entitled *In Bad Faith? British Charity and Hindu Extremism*, on Sewa activities in the United Kingdom.' The authors of these two reports, which caused a scandal in India, the United States, and Great Britain, lay bare the whole foreign financing structure of the *Sangh Parivar* through the IDRF and Sewa-UK, and reveal the institutional and personal

⁷⁵ Jaffrelot, *Religion, Caste and Politics in India*, p.701. "Since September 2003, Hindutva organizations resolutely present themselves as ethnic lobbies. On this date, some of them, including Hindu Forum UK, as well as several MPs of Indian stock launched an 'Operation Hindu Vote' modelled after the 'Operation Black Vote.'" (p.711)

relations that link the Hindu diaspora in these countries to the Sangh.

...the British contribution is well known now thanks to the AWAAZ investigation. Sewa-UK, the main Hindu nationalist fundraising agency in Great Britain, proved to be extremely effective following the Bhuj earthquake in Gujarat in 2003, the Gujaratis forming the most solid Hindu nationalist support network in England. Altogether, Sewa-UK has allegedly collected £2,3 million nearly all of which—£1.9 million of it—was transferred to the Gujarati branch of Sewa Bharti. A third of these funds apparently served to build Hindu nationalist schools, particularly in the tribal areas, whereas it was supposed to go to rebuilding destroyed villages. (pp.706-7)

The details of Sewa UK's fundraising for Gurjarat were also outlined in a Channel 4 report titled "Funding Gujarat extremists" that aired in December 2002. It should be no surprise that Sewa UK is based in the same Leicester-based building as the headquarters of HSS UK.

The AWAAZ investigation that Professor Jaffrelot referred to is also worth reading in its own right and was titled "*In Bad Faith? British Charity and Hindu Extremism*" (2004). The report is clear that:

The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh UK (HSS UK) is the UK branch of the RSS and shares the RSS's aims and ideology. The HSS UK is a registered charity. Sewa International UK (SIUK), though not a registered charity, is the fundraising arm of the HSS UK." (p.6)⁷⁶

...
Sewa Bharati is the main recipient of funds from SIUK. It is the RSS service affiliate, founded in 1979. It became very

⁷⁶ "Public sector grants to the HSS UK are modest, amounting to about £20,000 a year after 1999 (but reaching around £40,000 in previous years.) The HSS UK (including SIUK and the Hindu Marathon) have previously received public sector grant aid or funds from the London boroughs of Brent and Newham, the city councils of Bradford, Coventry and Leeds, as well as support from Nottingham and Derby councils." AWAAZ, *In Bad Faith?*, p.54.

important after 1989, when the RSS decided to expand its service sector. The senior vice president of Sewa Bharati, New Delhi, D. V. Kohli said, 'We make no secret of the fact that we are members of the RSS'. Sewa Bharati Madhya Pradesh was implicated in violence against Christian communities, leading the state government to revoke its license to operate there, and its role in violence against Christians continues.⁷⁷

And in defining the politics of the RSS the AWAAZ reports explains:

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS - National Volunteers Corps) is a paramilitary, all-male political organization founded in the 1920s and dedicated to turning India into an exclusive 'Hindu nation' based on 'Hindu strength' and 'Hindu unity'. RSS founders were strongly inspired by Fascist and Nazi ideas and the RSS was modeled on Fascist youth organizations. The RSS and its allies have been repeatedly named by judicial inquiries for their role in religiously-motivated violence over several decades. The RSS has been banned three times in India, twice for its role in fomenting religious hatred and serious anti-minority violence. M. K. Gandhi's murderer was an RSS activist. (p.6)

Based in Leicester, the 2004 investigation concluded that:

The HSS is... the core body to which the other UK sangh parivar organizations report. The HSS UK has a board of six trustees and ten office bearers for its central executive

⁷⁷AWAAZ, *In Bad Faith?*, p.14. "Most striking of all was the behaviour of these organizations in the wake of the Gujarat carnage in 2002 which left 2,000 dead and over 200,000 displaced and languishing in miserable refugee camps. The response of SIUK, the HSS, the VHP, the National Hindu Students Forum and every other UK Hindutva group to appeals for humanitarian relief was silence. This was despite considerable coverage of the carnage in the UK media and desperate major appeals by secular Gujarati NGOs. This is not surprising: the majority of the victims of the carnage were Indian citizens who were Muslim. They were victims of organizations such as the VHP, RSS and VKA whose work the HSS UK, the VHP UK and SIUK promote and glorify." (p.41)

committee (Kendriya Karyakari Mandal). The HSS UK headquarters is in Leicester. The Leicester office is called ‘Keshav Pratishtan’ (institute), ‘Keshav’ being the first name of the Indian RSS founder. The inauguration of the office on 22 April 1995 was presided over by the then supreme leader of the Indian RSS, Rajendra Singh. This Leicester address is also the official address of several Hindutva organizations in the UK, including Sewa International UK (SIUK), the National Hindu Students Forum (NHSF), the Kalyan Ashram Trust (KAT) and the Hindu Sahitya Kendra. The HSS also has offices in Bradford and Birmingham.⁷⁸

Although it remains the case that the far-right politics of the global Hindu nationalist movement are supported by the British Conservative Party, for many years leading members of the Labour Party have similarly thrown their support behind Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – the electoral vehicle for RSS. Hence as the 2004 investigation noted: “The director of the Labour Friends of India is also involved in the HSS’s Sewa International and FISU activities. He is the brother of the Overseas Friends of the BJP (UK) general secretary and HSS UK officer who organized the visit of Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi to the UK in 2003.”⁷⁹ Although not named by AWAAZ, the individual who was then serving as the general secretary of the Overseas Friends of the BJP (UK) was the late Anil Pota, and it was his nephew (not brother), Vikas Pota, who directed the work of Labour Friends of India. (Vikas Pota’s colleague and fellow director of lobbying firm Saffron Chase, Manoj Ladwa, went on to serve, in 2014, “as a member of the hugely successful Narendra Modi for Prime Minister campaign” and boasts of having been “instrumental in organising many of Prime Minister Modi’s diaspora engagements including at Wembley Stadium in 2015.”)⁸⁰

⁷⁸ AWAAZ, *In Bad Faith?*, p.42. “The UK organizations pretend to be simply religious or cultural organizations that represent Hindus and they attempt to disguise their links with political extremism in India.” (p.6)

⁷⁹ AWAAZ, *In Bad Faith?*, p.51.

⁸⁰ As Manoj Ladwa’s LinkedIn account explains: “Manoj campaigns actively on various community issues and strives for better political representation for people of Indian origin in the UK. He is a founder member and first

Finally, bringing us back to Leicester, the AWAAZ report highlighted how:

It is important to also consider the role of former HSS UK full-time worker, Ram Vaidya. He is one of the two sons of M.G. (Baburao) Vaidya, a senior RSS figure and RSS media spokesperson. Ram Vaidya, himself a senior RSS propagator, was seemingly sent [to Leicester] in 1999 from the RSS in India to become a full-time worker for the HSS UK, to evaluate the operations and structure of the HSS UK, and to expand HSS work in Europe, including coordination of European annual training camps (Sangh Shiksha Vargs). (p.48)

Ram Vaidya's work is also mentioned in a discussion of the ongoing activities of the HSS and Overseas Friends of the BJP in the more recent book, *Messengers of Hindu Nationalism: How the RSS Reshaped India* (2019). As the authors of this text explain:

The HSS is very much politically active now—indeed, the drawing power of Modi's overseas rallies owes much to the efforts of HSS activists in the three dozen countries where it has a presence. All national HSS units are administratively and legally independent from one another and from the RSS proper, though full-time RSS pracharaks from India are often assigned to them. Working closely with the HSS to organize Modi's rallies is the Overseas Friends of the BJP (OFBJP), an administrative wing of the BJP operating from the party office in New Delhi. Current OFBJP coordinator, Vijay Chauthaiwale, a former non-resident Indian in the US, said his critical first task in orchestrating these rallies is to identify what he described to us as 'talented, energetic, pro-Indian and selfless team players' to work as volunteers with the local HSS. Chauthaiwale himself brings to these endeavours a legitimacy among overseas RSS members born of generations of RSS

President of National Hindu Students Forum UK. He is a former Director & Trustee of the Avanti School Trust and founder Trustee of volunteering charity SEWA Day."

involvement by his family. His father was an RSS activist, his uncle a pracharak close to Golwalkar and Deoras; his wife is heavily engaged in the India Foundation in New Delhi (a think tank with close ties to the Modi government), while his daughter is involved in an affiliated organization. Another family with both deep RSS roots and a spirit of overseas volunteerism is the Vaidya family; the sangh's joint general secretary (formerly its prachar pramukh) is Manmohan Vaidya, whose father Prof. M.G. Vaidya was the first prachar pramukh of the RSS, and whose brother Ram Vaidya, a pracharak, heads the HSS in Europe. This growing network of deeply committed RSS families—linked both to the sangh and with each other—is becoming a significant recruitment pool for RSS workers and sangh parivar activists. (pp.45-6)⁸¹

Overturing the Saffron Republic

– October 5, 2022

Earlier this year a useful collection of essays was published by Cambridge University Press as *Saffron Republic: Hindu Nationalism and State Power in India*, a book which addresses “contemporary Hindutva as an example of a democratic authoritarianism or an authoritarian populism, that is, a politics that simultaneously advances and violates ideas and practices of popular and constitutional democracy.” With the latest electoral success of the far-right in Italy occurring only last week,⁸² it is more than apparent that:

⁸¹ For further examinations of the role of HSS UK in promoting the extremist ideology of Hindutva, see “Violence in Leicester and the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh” (September 23, 2022), and “The “ideological commonality” of the far-right RSS and the Leicester-based HSS UK” (September 27, 2022). To learn more about the role played by the RSS in the Gujarat pogrom of 2002 watch *Unreported World: Saffron Warriors* – a documentary that was directed by Burhan Wazir and was shown on Channel 4 in July 2002. The documentary includes important face-to-face interviews with both Modi and a leader of the RSS in Gujarat.

⁸² ISA in Italy, “Most right wing government since Mussolini,” *International Socialist Alternative*, September 28, 2022.

The problem at hand is not unique to India. In recent years, authoritarian and populist governments have formed within constitutional (and in many cases, liberal) democracies in many different parts of the world. As with the Indian BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, leaders like Donald Trump, Recep Erdoğan, Viktor Orbán, Rodrigo Duterte, and other strongmen around the world have not directly annulled democracy in order to come to power. Rather, they have used democracy's normal and normative resources, relying, for instance, on the continued functioning of key democratic procedures such as elections, and on laws and institutions authorized by their respective constitutions.⁸³

Modi himself initially became a member of the paramilitary Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in the 1960s, and since 2014 has served as the Prime Minister of India for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party), which itself is a progeny of the RSS. However, before seizing control of India's future, Modi had been the chief minister for Gujarat, sitting in power during the infamous anti-Muslim pogroms of 2002. This violence did not sit well with international witnesses, so to help protect Modi's reputation the RSS "formed a new affiliate, the Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM, or Muslim National Forum), dedicated to the cause of Muslim outreach." (p.219) Formally launched in December 2002 the MRM was arguably...

... expedited as a safety-valve, or as 'political prophylactic' because of a deep sense of anxiety that the RSS experienced post-2002 Gujarat riots when a number of national and international fact-finding commissions of inquiry and international human rights groups unequivocally indicted the Sangh Parivar and the Narendra Modi regime of enabling the Gujarat pogroms and provoking violence against Indian Muslims. By foregrounding a new relationship with Muslims and by creating Muslim representation within the

⁸³ Thomas Blom Hansen and Srirupa Roy (eds.), *Saffron Republic: Hindu Nationalism and State Power in India* (2022), pp.1-2, p.4.

organization, the RSS attempted to deflect criticism and insulate itself from these new political challenges. (p.224)

Of course, the political use of communal violence continued to play a vital role in Modi and the BJP's eventual ascension to supreme power. Hence just prior to the BJP's electoral breakthrough in May 2014, in September communal violence broke out in Muzaffarnagar and Shamli districts of Uttar Pradesh (UP) "after a year-long campaign by BJP leaders and local units accusing Muslim youth of engaging in 'love jihad', that is, marrying young Hindu women with the sole intention of converting them to Islam."⁸⁴ The idea of a 'love jihad' being a particularly vile conspiracy that had been manufactured by the BJP leadership.

[On] 16 May 2014: The sixteenth Lok Sabha election results are declared and the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is victorious. The NDA wins a total of 336 out of the 543 contested seats in India's lower house (Lok Sabha). Narendra Modi of the BJP is sworn in as the fifteenth prime minister of India on 26 May 2014. The BJP's campaign rhetoric focuses on the promise of achhe din (good days) and a corruption- (and Congress-) free India - crucially though, the BJP benefits from the polarization of local communities in the aftermath of the Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013 that helped to consolidate the Hindu vote across north and central India. (p.26)

For more on these riots watch Nakul Sawhney's 2015 film *Muzaffarnagar Baaqi Hai (Muzaffarnagar Eventually)* which "explores the various social, political, and economic reasons and fallouts of the massacre."

But now it seems, as another contributor to *Saffron Republic* puts it:

If in the past the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates engineered 'riots' by spreading rumours and aggravating local tensions, they no longer need to do so. In the

⁸⁴ Hansen and Roy, *Saffron Republic*, p.25.

current political environment and amidst the massive growth of social media, the mere suspicion that a Muslim or Christian is violating Hindu social codes is justification for violence. While in the past, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) fostered Hindu-Muslim tensions prior to elections to influence their outcomes, it now does so more frequently and less predictably. Hindu nationalist violence has increasingly become both routinized and normalized. (p.59)

“Because of its large electoral majority and the lack of an effective parliamentary opposition,”⁸⁵ the BJP government has therefore been able to do much to consolidate its power. But it remains the case that the Indian working-class have not accepted the BJP’s authoritarian ways laying down. For example, in December 2019 the government passed their anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act (CCA) in the Indian Parliament, “leading to widespread protests against its perceived discriminatory intent.” While on December 30, 2019, a timeline of significant events notes how:

The central government picks out a hundred railway routes for private carriers to operate 150 passenger trains every year. Later in January 2020, the Indian Railways announces that its production units will soon be privatized in a modernization drive and private companies will be allowed to manage around 750 railway stations across the country. The All India Railwaymen’s Federation (AIRF) launched a nationwide strike in September 2020 against the privatization of the Indian Railways. (pp.48-9)

And on September 20, 2020:

The Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance Act, and the Farm Services and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Ordinance are introduced in the Indian Parliament – two of these bills are passed through a ‘voice vote’ in the Rajya Sabha.

⁸⁵ Hansen and Roy, *Saffron Republic*, p.6.

Under a voice vote, the Speaker (or in this case, the Deputy Chairman) seeks a response from members of the House in terms of ‘ayes’ or ‘noes’, and decides on the success of a motion depending on which side is louder (if ‘aye’, then the motion is passed). Crucially, this process circumvents the standard procedure of having members of Parliament vote on any legislation. Farmers’ groups claim that these laws bypass the existing Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) and the Minimum Support Price (MSP) regime for agricultural commodities, and will instead allow private entities to dictate agricultural commodity prices. Protests against these laws are particularly intense in the states of Punjab and Haryana. On 26 September, the Shiromani Akali Dal quit the BJP-led NDA alliance in protest against the passage of the farm bills. (p.55)

These events fortunately led to the development of a huge mass movement of ordinary people, and” Following nearly a year of sustained protests by farmers from Punjab, Haryana, and UP [Uttar Pradesh], PM Modi announced the withdrawal of the three farm laws on 19 November 2021.” Nevertheless, despite this “announcement, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) – one of the leading organizations in the protests –... vowed to continue the struggle until the central government legally guarantees the MSP regime (and meets other demands).”⁸⁶

Yet as the preceding quotes illustrate, while *Saffron Republic* does briefly touch upon existing forms of resistance to Modi’s regime, the book fails to examine in any detail the types of mass workers movements that continue to oppose the BJP. For example, the book makes no reference to the January 2020 general strike that involved 250 million workers (the world’s largest ever general strike), or the second general strike of that year that took place on November 26 and also involved 250 million workers. In these huge shows of working-class strength, the “trade unions explicitly linked their strike to the

⁸⁶ Hansen and Roy, *Saffron Republic*, p.58. For more on this victory, see Mohamed Nawaz, “Heroic farmers movement wins concessions from right-wing Modi government,” *International Socialist Alternative*, November 26, 2021.

farmers' protest, just as in January it was linked to the mass protest against the citizenship laws of the BJP government that sought to institutionalise discrimination against Muslims in particular."⁸⁷

Echoing the point made in *Saffron Republic* about the "lack of an effective parliamentary opposition," Achin Vanaik, the author of the 2017 book *The Rise of Hindu Authoritarianism: Secular Claims, Communal Realities*, has pointed out how "none of the opposition parties are seriously committed to reversing India's neoliberal turn since the early 1990s." Hence:

Within the Hindi heartland, a public 'common sense' that has been substantially shaped by Hindutva ideological claims and motifs unfortunately reigns. With the exception of India's mainstream left, which is now in serious decline, the rest of the opposition parties have all accepted to some degree that there is a dominant 'Hindu community' which must be wooed as such. On foreign policy, the opposition parties simply echo the belligerent nationalism of Modi's government, or even accuse it of being too soft on Pakistan and China.⁸⁸

This lack of an organised political resistance helps explain why most of India's trade unions have proven unwilling to challenge the capitalist routes of Modi's authoritarian regime. It is not good enough to use general strikes in a symbolic sense to express workers' anger, instead

⁸⁷ Geert Cool, "Massive protest puts Modi under fire," *International Socialist Alternative*, December 7, 2020.

⁸⁸ Achin Vanaik, "The Indian Farmers' Movement has shown us how to fight Narendra Modi," *Jacobin*, August 12, 2021. The organising of huge General Strikes concretely shows the potential for opposing Modi if there existed the type of socialist leaders within society who were consistent fighters for their class. This leadership however is lacking, being held back in part by Stalinist politicians. Here the Marxist commentator, Achin Vanaik has surmised the Stalinists shortcomings fairly bluntly in this way: "Long reduced to primarily an electoral force with a diminishing cadre base that clings to old Stalinist verities when it does think about Marxism, their cadres with a few exceptions in a few places, have lost the capacity and interest in pursuing the politics of popular mobilization around genuine and justified grievances." "The Indian catastrophe," *Jacobin*, May 30, 2019.

they must be used politically, that is, be utilised by workers in an effort to overthrow the BJP's oppressive regime and replace it with a democratic and socialist alternative. That is why:

Socialists are defending the need for a battle plan so that protests are not limited to one-off events. The farmers' movement shows the strength of a well-prepared protest wave over the longer term. What are the trade union leaders waiting for in order to draw up an equally ambitious and audacious action plan to join the farmers' struggle? A plan that makes it clear that the fight will be stepped up to the point in which the demands of the workers are heard. To begin with, all unions should join the call by the farmers for a 'bharat bandh' (general strike) on December 8 – not only in words but also in deeds, as a first step towards further joint action practically mobilising workers alongside the farmers.

There is great dissatisfaction among broad sections of the population, but long-term mobilisation will require an alternative to the present policies. Rejecting neoliberal reforms is a good and necessary starting point. In a period of global economic decline and increasing tensions in the context of the new cold war, it is becoming increasingly clear that capitalism means misery and hunger for the Indian masses. There is a need for a complete overhaul of the system. Revolutionary activists must organise themselves in order to lay the foundations for the socialist change that is so badly needed on the Indian subcontinent!⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Geert Cool, "Massive protest puts Modi under fire," *International Socialist Alternative*, December 7, 2020.

Leicester's Violence and Modi's India

– February 8, 2024

“A year and a half ago, Hindus and Muslims clashed in the streets of one of Britain’s most diverse cities,” writes Yohann Koshy in an important *Guardian* article published earlier today about the communal violence that blighted Leicester in 2022; leading him to ponder the question: “What lay behind the violence?”⁹⁰ Here he highlights how “the ultra-nationalist atmosphere of Narendra Modi’s India might be spreading beyond its borders.”

Unlike most mainstream articles that have been written about Leicester’s violence Koshy correctly examines the relevance of the far-right RSS. “The uniformed, quasi-paramilitary group, which is the ideological parent of India’s ruling BJP,” which Koshy adds, “dreams of transforming secular India into an avowedly Hindu nation, in which minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, pay fealty to Hindu supremacy as a condition of their continued presence.”

While he goes on to say that it “does seem fanciful” that the RSS “were openly organising in Leicester” he states that “what is interesting – and has not been widely reported – is that Leicester houses the UK headquarters of a group that is widely understood to be the overseas arm of the RSS, the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS).” He then quotes Professor Christophe Jaffrelot, an expert in Hindu nationalism at King’s College London, as stating that “The HSS is organised in the exact same way as the RSS in India,” using the same titles and ranks.

None of this information is secret and as Koshy goes on to explain:

Founded in 1966 by east African Asians, today the HSS UK claims to run more than 100 weekly *shakhas*, or branches, across Britain, attended by more than 2,000 people. There is a focus on yoga, games, youth activities, charity and active citizenship. Last summer, I visited a building near

⁹⁰ Yohann Koshy, “What the unrest in Leicester revealed about Britain – and Modi’s India,” *Guardian*, February 8, 2024.

Belgrave Road that houses the group's head office. On the ground floor is a bookshop that sells religious and pro-RSS literature, alongside colourful children's books. I bought a copy of *Delhi Riots: The Untold Story*, which gives a revisionist account of communal violence that took place in Delhi in 2020 and left at least 53 dead, the majority Muslim. (The book argues that the violence was ultimately caused by jihadists in cahoots with the far left.)...

The HSS UK's trustees have told the Charity Commission that there is no formal connection between it and the RSS, only an "ideological commonality", as the commission put it. But the group's relationship with the RSS is public and visible. Its Leicester headquarters were inaugurated in 1995 by the man who was then the RSS's supreme chief. In 2016, the current RSS leader was the guest of honour at the HSS's 50-year celebration in Hertfordshire.

The *Guardian* journalist then connects the violent activism of the Hindu nationalist community with the historic and ongoing violence associated with the consecration of a controversial Hindu temple in Ayodhya on January 22, 2024 - "a location that many believe to be the birthplace of the deity Ram." Koshy writes:

Last month, Modi inaugurated that temple in a spectacular ceremony that was the culmination of a decades-long campaign, pivoting on the destruction of a mosque on the [Ayodhya] site in 1992. In Leicester, there was a peaceful march in which devotees chanted 'Jai Shree Ram'. Keith Vaz, the former [Labour] MP for Leicester East, who is still influential in his old constituency, gave a speech in a temple in which he paid tribute to prime minister Modi 'for the work that he has done'.

Koshy's article does not go into any further details about Vaz's toxic role in Leicester, but Vaz's influence is still felt today as he still remains active with the Leicester East Constituency Labour Party having previously served as the area's MP between 1987 and 2019. As I wrote in September 2022:

Vaz of course remains famous in Leicester for many reasons, and although he was first elected on a socialist ticket in the late eighties, it didn't take long for him to reveal himself as a careerist who would rather promote the needs of big business and imperialist wars than defend the needs of all of his working-class constituents. (For more on this, read "The secret of Keith Vaz's life of war.")

Part of Vaz's relentless careerism and political opportunism has meant that he supports the far-right Hindu-nationalist government led by Narendra Modi. Vaz's strong support for Modi is however no secret, and so when Modi was re-elected in May 2019, Vaz attended a celebration party at a local temple which was reported on in the local press. Indeed, Vaz's uncritical embrace of India's far-right government has only acted further divide our communities, and his actions have sown much political confusion in a city where the leadership of the local Labour Party have, in recent years anyway, been more concerned with attacking Jeremy Corbyn's socialist ideals than in presenting a political alternative to Tory austerity.⁹¹

Indeed, as I pointed out at the time I wrote this article, "with the recent outbreak of communal violence in our city... Vaz's own political interventions should not be overlooked when seeking to understand how we might best overcome Leicester's problems." This was evident last month, when in uncritically celebrating the construction of the extremely controversial new temple in Ayodhya, Vaz addressed a packed room at Leicester's Shree Hanuman Temple saying:

I have come the farthest today because I have arrived from and I came back from Mumbai because [the temple Secretary] Rajesh [Patel] said you have to come because it is such a special occasion; and I was in Mumbai and I said it is easier for me to come to Ayodhya than to come to Leicester, but he said you must come as this is very special for all of us in

⁹¹ Michael Barker, "Keith Vaz and his support of Hindu nationalism," *Thoughts of a Leicester Socialist*, September 26, 2022.

Leicester, all of us in the United Kingdom, and all of us who celebrate this important opening of this temple this week... India is buzzing with excitement. Every single picture on the television in India is about the opening of the temple, and I want to pay tribute to Prime Minister Modi for the work that he has done.⁹²

Vaz, ostensibly being a member of the Labour Party, is needless to say fully aware of the violent controversies that swirl around both Modi's authoritarian rule and around the history of Ayodhya and the recent consecration of the new temple. A consecration, which, as a subsequent report by Human Rights Watch highlighted, "led to sectarian clashes as well as incidents of vandalism, threats, and assault against Muslims and other religious minorities in several parts of the country."⁹³ The Human Rights Watch report was also clear that:

The consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya is widely seen as a culmination of Hindu majoritarian and political demands led by the ruling BJP and its affiliates. The temple was constructed around the site where the 16th century Babri Mosque stood until a Hindu mob demolished it in 1992. Many Hindus believe that the mosque had been built on the ruins of a previous temple marking the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram. Thousands died in religious clashes and riots across the country following the demolition.

⁹² Other local city councillors who attended the Shree Hanuman Temple included Cllr Devi Singh-Patel, Cllr Geeta Karavadra, and Cllr Hemant Rae Bhatia.

⁹³ "India: Violence marks Ram Temple inauguration," *Human Rights Watch*, January 31, 2024.

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