

Guardian's Zoe Williams tries to rehabilitate Tony Blair

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“Stop calling Tony Blair a war criminal. The left should be proud of his record”, implored journalist Zoe Williams in the *Guardian* last week.

“From Northern Ireland to the NHS [National Health Service], Blair left a real progressive blueprint”, she continued, “But the left has allowed it to be obliterated by Iraq”.

The occasion for Williams' plea was an article by the former Labour prime minister for the *Guardian* on the 20th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, along with comments Blair made on the *Today* programme supporting military intervention in Syria.

The man who dismissed the million-plus protest in London in February 2003 against the impending attack on Iraq by claiming that leadership meant ignoring popular will, amplified his hostility to democratic accountability in his article by asserting that if it weren't for the invasion of Iraq, “you would have had the so-called Arab spring” come to Baghdad.

The overthrow of corrupt, dictatorial regimes in popular uprisings is something Blair is deeply hostile to, not least because he speaks as the bought-and-paid-for agent of many of them.

His Tony Blair Associates (TBA) advises Rwandan President Paul Kagame, whom Williams coyly references as a “more controversial figure” than Blair's *Guardian* fluff piece for Kagame's regime lets on--not least for the ruthless repression of political opponents and the gross abuses carried out in Congo by the Rwandan army over the course of two decades.

TBA has also “advised” Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, two of the prime and thoroughly reactionary backers of the Islamist opposition forces in Syria, and Blair recently presented a flattering eulogy to Israel's former prime minister Ariel Sharon, author of the 1982 massacre of Palestinians.

Blair is also a vocal defender of the military coup in

Egypt that saw Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Mursi overthrown and thousands of his supporters murdered or jailed.

Williams couldn't care less about any of this. “Blair left a blueprint for social democratic government; it wasn't perfect and some of it was disastrous”, she writes. “But we can't even see it because it has been obliterated by the bloodshed of the Iraq war”.

This inability to “get over Iraq” is “completely silencing the left”, she continues, and has “strangled” the voice of Labour, preventing it from praising its earlier achievements.

One can imagine the type of article Williams would have turned out had she been writing in Germany in 1944: “Never mind Hitler's war crimes--look at the autobahns”.

Just as the *Anschluss* (the incorporation of Austria into Germany in 1938) led inexorably to the annexation of Czechoslovakia, to the invasion of Poland and, finally, to World War II, eleven years on it is now clear that the illegal invasion of Iraq unleashed a wave of imperialist militarism on the part of US and British capitalism that, now in the Ukraine, threatens the world once again with a global conflagration.

The historical analogy goes further. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the German bourgeoisie sought to conceal its crimes, while leading Nazis maintained their positions in the state.

Similarly, Britain's ruling elite desperately need to erase the lessons of Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and elsewhere in order to prepare even greater atrocities.

Consider what it is that Williams wants to move on from.

Iraq was the conflict that introduced new words and images--such as Abu Ghraib and naked human “pyramids”--and new means of torture.

They were just the publicly exposed reality of a war and occupation that has caused the deaths of an estimated one

million Iraqis since 2003. As of 2011, nearly three million Iraqis had been displaced by the invasion and the bitter sectarian conflict that it generated. Poverty is widespread, leading to cholera outbreaks, while the use of depleted uranium and white phosphorus by Western forces has led to a significant rise in birth defects.

Because of the Iraq catastrophe, Blair left office in 2007 as officially (and deservedly) the most hated prime minister in recent history, with opinion polls finding that half the population believed he would make his way into the history books as an unindicted war criminal.

Since then Blair has been subject to additional (also deserved) ignominy for amassing more money since leaving office than any other former British prime minister in history, with a personal fortune estimated at £70 million, according to the *Daily Telegraph*.

A 2011 Channel Four *Dispatches* documentary, “The Wonderful World of Tony Blair”, revealed how the former prime minister had traded off on his Iraq war credentials, using his extensive dealings in the Middle East, in particular with regimes that had profited hugely from the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, to build up his TBA consultancy.

The *Guardian* has routinely portrayed the Iraq war as Blair’s one “major” failing to prepare the way for the continuation of Labour’s pro-big business agenda under first Gordon Brown and now Ed Miliband. Only a day after Blair announced his resignation, the *Guardian*’s Polly Toynbee wrote that it was “time to look back with pre-emptive nostalgia”.

In her piece, Williams scrapes the bottom of the barrel to come up with anything that might arouse enthusiasm for the former prime minister.

To the widespread death and destruction caused in Iraq, Williams counterposes Blair’s introduction of the minimum wage in 1998, the supposed decrease in pensioner poverty from three to two million people, “modernised” hospitals and the Northern Ireland Good Friday agreement.

In reality, the Iraq war and related policies were integral to a historically unprecedented shift in wealth away from the working class and into the coffers of the major corporations and a fabulously rich elite, a shift in which social democracy in Britain and internationally played a lead role.

Between 1997 and 2007, the wealth of the top 1,000 richest people in Britain trebled to a combined £360 billion, making the UK one of the most unequal countries in the world.

While the UK was turned into an onshore tax haven for the super-rich, debt became a fact of life for millions of people, with total personal debt exceeding £1.25 trillion when Blair left office.

The minimum wage of just £6.21 for those aged 21 years and over--“where do you think we’d be without” it, Williams asks triumphantly--was used to force down wages across the board, so that it is now the going rate for many jobs.

Meanwhile, the Blair government sped up the privatisation or “marketisation” of public services--creating a massive boom for the stock markets, consultancy firms and associated parasites, which directly paved the way for the carving up of the NHS and the sale of it “to Tory donors” that Williams now bemoans.

As for the Northern Ireland agreement, this had nothing to do with Blair’s “expertise” and everything to do with the fact that Sinn Fein had fully reconciled itself with British imperialism.

This is only the start of the political apologetics that Williams and her ilk are prepared to make. There is no crime that cannot be justified. After all, what the journalist cannot or will not say is that her admiration for Blair is linked intimately to her own prosperity and the prosperity of the upper-middle class layer to which she belongs.

The darling of Daniel Hannan, the Conservative European member of parliament and *Telegraph* columnist, who described her as the first on his list of the “top five Leftie columnists”, Williams can easily combine her “leftie” credentials, the product of her columns in the nominally liberal *Guardian*, with writings for the overtly right-wing *Spectator* and *London Evening Standard*.

Williams’ article makes clear that “Blairism” was neither an individual phenomenon, nor simply the activity of an especially corrupt individual. No less than her hero, Williams speaks for a privileged petty bourgeois layer that have grotesquely passed themselves off for decades as the “left”, using and abusing the term to feather their own nests. But, as her recent nauseating article brings out, that political fraud has now run its course.



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