

What is the connection between Britain First and Conservative leadership contender Jacob Rees-Mogg?

Steve James
14 February 2018

Jacob Rees-Mogg is currently second favourite to replace Prime Minister Theresa May as leader of the Conservative Party. He is the darling of the pro-Brexit Tory right and was recently elected chair of the European Research Group, which is coordinating efforts to ensure the hardest possible exit from the European Union (EU).

To watch or listen to Rees-Mogg is to be transported back several hundred years. So much so that the Eton-educated son of former *Times* editor Baron William Rees-Mogg is known as the “honorable member for the eighteenth century.”

More appropriate given his wealth is the title “honorable member for the East India Company.” Estimates put his personal wealth, along with his wife’s inheritance, at between £100 million and £150 million. He is the best paid MP in Westminster, earning, according to the *Spectator*, at least £216,000 a year on top of a vast, and undisclosed, income from his 15 percent share in Somerset Capital Management (SCM), the investment vehicle he helped establish in 2007. Targeted at “developing markets,” last year SCM paid £21.9 million to its 21 members. Prior to launching SCM, Rees-Mogg was in the charge of the Lloyd George Emerging Market Fund, whose assets ballooned from \$50 million to \$5 billion under his stewardship.

Rees-Mogg is reportedly in line for a huge personal windfall when Britain exits the EU, given SCM is heavily invested in the emerging markets the UK will orient towards.

Rees-Mogg is a member of the Cornerstone Group in the Tory Party, whose motto is Faith, Flag and Family, and flaunts his patriotic Christianity, which includes opposition to abortion and homosexuality. He is a bitter opponent of social welfare, insisting that the state should be reduced to the barest minimum.

An incident this month at Bristol’s University of the West of England (UWE) confirmed that these views have not only earned Rees-Mogg the admiration of the Tory right, but a significant following among fascists.

Invited to speak at UWE by the university’s Politics and International Relations Society, Rees-Mogg was the target of a small protest by half a dozen partially masked anarchists that became a media cause célèbre and led to debate in Parliament.

The protesters entered the back of the hall and noisily protested Rees-Mogg’s presence. What happened next was highly unusual. Rees-Mogg, an experienced politician, left his place at the front of the meeting and went to the back of the hall to confront a demonstrator.

Video footage and photos initially released showed Rees-Mogg challenging one demonstrator and then the outbreak of some pushing and shoving, including an attempted punch, during which he was jostled. The demonstrators were ejected without any great difficulty.

Headlines hailed Rees-Mogg as a hero, quoting his self-description as a “weed” and his supposedly principled insistence that he still believed in the right to protest. The *Spectator* wrote affectionately of how nothing would intimidate “the Moggster.”

The *Daily Express* hailed the fact that Rees-Mogg’s handling of the incident cut the odds on his being next Tory leader. Former UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage claimed the incident was the work of “a very extreme leftist group of people, very well-funded.” May herself praised the man tipped as her likely successor for standing up to violence and intimidation from “the left.”

So too did leading Labour politicians. Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner denounced those “who tried to attack [Rees-Mogg] ... It’s extremely intimidating for any MP who travels alone to an event to

be treated like this.”

Yvette Cooper, a former Labour Shadow Home Secretary agreed, tweeting, “This is appalling. No excuse for violence & aggression like this.”

Things began to go awry, however, largely thanks to various postings on social media that were then taken up by some newspapers.

The audience member hailed by the press for having sought to come to Rees-Mogg’s assistance, Paul Townsley, turned out to be an ex-soldier and martial arts expert who has been photographed at a family party in full Nazi regalia.

Mobile phone footage then proved that it was Townsley whose intervention made sure that a verbal exchange became physical. He barged into the group and attempted to manhandle the leading protester, former UWE student Josh Connor, towards the exit. When Connor’s girlfriend, Elena Andreea Dumitrache, objected, Townsley deliberately pushed her in the face.

Questions were then raised on social media as to why Townsley was present at the event, and even whether he was providing personal security for Rees-Mogg. That would at least suggest a reason why the politician felt able to place himself in the middle of protesters.

Asked about whether he knew Townsley, Rees-Mogg gave an evasive answer. “He is not a friend of mine,” he said, before adding, “It is possible that we have met at an event before.”

It transpired that Townsley has posted repeatedly on social media in praise of the Tory leadership challenger replacing May.

Whatever the exact relationship between the two men, Townsley is not the only right-winger prepared to commit violence in defence of Rees-Mogg.

In an extraordinary video, Britain First leader Paul Golding was filmed ranting in his car, threatening potential protesters: “If you keep harassing people like Jacob Rees-Mogg then you will get the Britain First cannons turned on you ...

“We will find out where you live. We will find out where you work. We will find out where you study—and we will come down on you like a ton of bricks.”

Golding’s sinister statements came the day after Darren Osborne was sentenced to 43 years in prison for murder and attempted murder for driving a van into a group of worshippers outside Finsbury Park Mosque in London. Osborne said in court that he had initially intended to target Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and London Mayor Sadiq Khan. Shortly prior to his murderous assault,

Osborne received personal messages from leaders of Britain First and the fascist English Defence League.

In 2016, during the Brexit referendum campaign, Labour MP Jo Cox was murdered by long-time fascist sympathiser Thomas Mair. Mair shouted “Britain First!” as he repeatedly stabbed and shot Cox.

Rees-Mogg is not merely an innocent object of far-right affection. This is a milieu that is being deliberately cultivated.

It was Britain First posts that were retweeted by US President Donald Trump last year as part of his fascistic diatribes. Trump later denied knowing anything about Britain First. But last December, Rees-Mogg held a private meeting with Steve Bannon, Trump’s fascistic former adviser.

That meeting was organised by Rahemm Kassam, the London editor of *Breitbart*, whose cameras were present at Bristol.

In 2013, Rees-Mogg was featured speaker at the annual dinner of the Traditional Britain Group. The group has its origins in the Western Goals Institute set up by General Sir Walter Walker—who was intimately involved in various plots of a military coup to bring down the Labour government of Harold Wilson in the mid-1970s—and the Tory Monday Club.

Traditional Britain founder Lord Sudeley praised Hitler, at a Monday Club meeting in 2006, for getting “everyone back to work” and stated that “the fact may be that some races are superior to others.”

Among its aims is support for the “time-honoured hereditary principle and our monarchy,” opposition to “communism, to socialism, to libertarianism, to anarchism” and support for “humane and voluntary state-assisted resettlement” of ethnic minority Britons.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact