

Introduction

'I bitterly regret not supporting the impeachment of Tony Blair'

Alice Mahon

Alice Mahon visited New Zealand and brought us the extraordinary analysis by Judge Thomas (see below). She was MP for Halifax from 1987 to 2005.

We should be grateful to Judge Thomas for his brilliant analysis, 'An Indictment of Tony Blair, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, and the Failure of the Political Process.'

As a Labour MP, I along with other colleagues opposed the war. I organised inside and outside parliament, forming and chairing the Iraq Liaison Committee, which brought together MPs across the political spectrum. I met Tony Blair and other members of the Cabinet on a number of occasions in a vain attempt to persuade them that any military intervention based upon such flimsy evidence would lead to massive loss of life and appalling consequences for the people of the region. At every level we were told Saddam was a threat to the world and that he had weapons of mass destruction.

In many heated exchanges with the Prime Minister I have to say he never once accepted an argument against the military option.

In spring 2002 I sponsored the first early day motion against the war. I had spoken to journalists who had accompanied Tony Blair on the now infamous visit to the Bush ranch in Texas. They were convinced that Blair had pledged his support for war on that visit. I believed them even though Downing Street denied that any decision had been taken, and it is my belief that they continuously and deliberately lied to MPs, the media, and the country. The decision to go to war had been taken.

It is good to see the whole presentation and the content of the 'dodgy dossier' dissected legally, and elegantly rubbished. It is also good to see the Prime Minister's theatrical assertions about the reality of weapons of mass destruction exposed for the shallow spin that it really was.

I spoke at the biggest protest rally ever seen in this country, and right up to the vote on going to war, I used what little influence I had to try to prevent it. All to no avail. Blair was determined to go to war. He was not concerned about the illegality, after all he had got away with it in Yugoslavia, which was also an illegal war, and

in his own words he was willing to ‘pay the blood price’.

What a bloody price that has been. A country destroyed, 600,000 of its people killed, millions more who have fled the violence or have been ethnically cleansed are refugees in other countries. Nearly 4,000 allied troops are dead and thousands have been sent home with hideous injuries, and yet Tony Blair is still Prime Minister and it is said that as soon as he retires he will earn millions as he tours the rich man’s world boasting about his exploits.

How can this be right?

War crimes on a massive scale have been committed in his name since the invasion. Remember Fallujah. The first assault on Fallujah was reported by Al Jazeera. The world saw the brutality of the US forces and Bush had to withdraw his troops.

The second assault, which took place in November 2004, did not have Al Jazeera to act as a witness as they had been banned from reporting in Iraq by the puppet government of Allawi.

The United States claimed that the city was an insurgent enclave and they ordered the city to be evacuated. However, it is widely agreed that between 30,000 and 50,000 civilians were left in the city, but that did not stop the military treating Fallujah as if its only inhabitants were insurgents. The US military destroyed thousands of homes, illegally denied civilians access to the Red Cross and, according to the United Nations’ special rapporteur, ‘used hunger and deprivation as a weapon of war against the civilian population’. Under the Geneva Conventions these actions are war crimes. These, however, were not the only war crimes committed in Fallujah.

In Fallujah the United States military used white phosphorus, a chemical weapon. According to reporter Darrin Mortensen working for a San Diego newspaper who was embedded with the US military,

‘Cpl. Nicholas Bogart, a US marine, directed his men to fire round after round of high explosives and white phosphorus into the city for two days, never knowing what the targets were or what damage the resulting explosions caused’.

There is other evidence of the use of white phosphorus. In his documentary ‘Fallujah – The Hidden Massacre’, Sigfredo Ranucci, an Italian producer working for RAI, a public broadcasting company, documented in graphic detail the horror that was Fallujah.

I asked the Ministry of Defence twice if chemical weapons had been used in Fallujah, and twice the Ministry of Defence denied they had been used. In June 2005, two months after I had left Parliament, my successor Linda Riordan received a letter from Adam Ingram admitting that they had been used.

Who will be held responsible for these war crimes? And how do we answer Judge Thomas’s claim? He says:

‘both Parliament and the Labour Party have failed the democratic imperative. Tony Blair, in foreign policy, exerted unbridled and unchecked power to pursue his personal vision. When that vision was threatened he was able to manipulate the political process to his own ends.’

He is absolutely correct, the Executive through the power of the whips control Parliament. The Prime Minister and a handful of close advisers control Party Conference.

At the 2002 conference great efforts were made by myself and others to be called to speak. The New Labour organisers went to extraordinary lengths to stop any one with an anti-war position from speaking. It was only after I had made a real nuisance of myself and the trade union sector kept shouting my name that I was eventually called.

That was the last real debate about Iraq at Conference for delegates. The foreign affairs and defence debates are now so tightly controlled that, in 2005, my friend Walter Wolfgang was thrown out and arrested for shouting 'rubbish' at Jack Straw.

With many others I believe that Tony Blair and George Bush should be held to account for visiting this appalling horror on the Iraqi people. I bitterly regret not supporting the impeachment of Tony Blair, but I concur with and support this excellent analysis put forward by Judge Thomas.



'A clear justification for the war in Iraq was never sufficiently made by Tony Blair ... No one can undo the decision to go to war. But the impeachment of Mr Blair is now something I believe must happen if we are to rekindle interest in the democratic process.'

General Sir Michael Rose in
The Guardian 10/1/06

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