

## 'Sir' Tony Blair – No thanks Ma'am!

**Ross:** Welcome to Renegade Inc. There are just three words that make any right thinking British person convulse. Those words are Sir, Tony, Blair.

**Ross:** George Galloway, wonderful to have you here on Renegade Inc.

**George Galloway:** Thank you. It's wonderful to be back.

**Ross:** It's no surprise that you were totally exorcised when you heard that Tony Blair was going to be Sir Tony Blair in the New Years honours gongs, if you like. Let me put a question to you. Is it not entirely predictable that an honours system that is so out of kilter with the British public and the British mood, isn't it predictable that Sir Tony is going to get a gong?

**George Galloway:** No, I think we didn't know that the system had sunk as low as this. Fourteen years have elapsed since Tony Blair - I won't call him, sir, if you don't mind, not least because it hasn't been invested yet, and I still hope to stop it. But 14 years have passed since Blair left office, and there has been no sighting of a garter around his thigh. And that's because Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, the late husband of the Queen, would not have countenanced it. He put his foot down against it. Not for the same reasons as I'm against it, perhaps, at least not wholly, but partly because he realised that Tony Blair was a hate figure. And to give the highest possible royal award to such a man could only bring the royal family further into disrepute. And it's not as if they're short of disreputable stories at the moment. The last thing that the Queen needed in her Platinum Jubilee year, God save her - but must be the twilight of her long reign - was a Tony Blair controversy like the one we're now in.

**Ross:** Let's just talk about the late Duke of Edinburgh a little more. Who do you think got to the Queen? He, obviously, is no longer with us, Prince Philip. Who do you think got to the Queen? Was it Blair's cronies that lobbied to get him that order of the garter? How did that, in your view, take place? What changed since Prince Philip is no longer here?

**George Galloway:** Well, the chattering classes tell us that he was bed blocking this order of the garter, which is 24 people strong. And there were three other former prime ministers - David Cameron, Theresa May and Gordon Brown - who would have been normally offered a place on it but couldn't because Blair had not been similarly ennobled. That's what the chattering classes say. I don't claim to have any special eyes and ears in the palace. But my suspicion is that Prince Charles, who does not share the animus towards Tony Blair that his father held, is probably the man most likely to have bent the Queen's ear. I don't think the Queen, herself, is actively engaged in weighing up the pros and cons of these things. She is almost ninety six years old. But perhaps I'm doing a disservice to her. Maybe she was involved in the discussions and negotiations around it. But however you dice it, it has now led to a situation where a mass demonstration will take place on June the 13th in the mid-summer in Windsor, outside Windsor Castle, in the Queen's Platinum Jubilee year, because people will simply not go quietly into the good night of Tony Blair making a comeback in this way.

**Ross:** There's absolutely no way that Prince Charles can read the public mood. All Britons, only 14 percent approve, 63 percent disapprove. Labour voters, 21 percent approve. 56 percent disapprove. And Conservative voters, only 10 percent and 79 percent disapprove. How possibly can you get it so wrong as a future King of England if it is Prince Charles that's pushing this narrative?

**George Galloway:** Well, his own numbers are not markedly better than that. So I think it's arrogance. It's the arrogant assumption that the monarchy will seamlessly transfer to him. Now, let me be blunt. I have never campaigned for the defenestration of the current monarch. I think she's done the best that she could. She's a venerable old lady, but I will not be quiet about the head of state ship transferring to an unelected person of low morals and apparently low intellect, because you'd have to be a fool to think that you would get away quietly with ennobling Tony Blair. So I'll be campaigning upon the demise of the Queen, and long life to her. I will be campaigning for a referendum in Britain on all of this panoply of pomp and circumstance, not just because I'm against it in principle, because it clearly isn't working. If we have a head of state that is so out of touch with the people that they think they can ennoble a war criminal, a man who should be on trial in The Hague for war crimes and crimes against humanity, that we can elevate him to the very highest echelon of the state. If Prince Charles is behind this, then I'm sorry he's an ass.

**Ross:** There's a veritable list of people who have rejected a gong - Frank Auerbach, Alan Bennett, the playwright, David Bowie, Danny Boyle, Michael Faraday, E.M. Forster, David Hockney, Aldous Huxley, Rudyard Kipling, Peter O'Toole, Harold Pinter, George Bernard Shaw, Vaughan Williams. The list is endless, people full of humility, creativity and humanity. Now, insofar as it comes to order of the garter, Neville Chamberlain refused to accept, he was too ill, and Harold Macmillan. But paraphrasing Ken Loach, that's a club that you don't really want to be in this New Year's Honours club, isn't it?

**George Galloway:** Yes, and there was no reason why Blair should have accepted this gong. As you say, two other Prime Ministers in the 20th century declined to accept it. I've got an idea, Ross. If he wants to be in the upper echelons of the British state, let him take a seat in the House of Lords.

**Ross:** Well, he's already rejected that.

**George Galloway:** And I'll tell you why. Because if he was in the House of Lords, he'd have to register his income, which is eye wateringly large and heartbreaking when you see the sources of it. It's not just that he's become filthy rich, it's the filthy patrons and customers that have made him filthy rich that he wants to conceal. That's why he'll never go into the House of Lords, because then he'd have to tell us, from exactly where did he get the £100 million personal fortune that the former leader of the Labour Party has amassed in the 14 years since leaving office.

**Ross:** Well, when you start to look at his record as the leader of the Labour Party, it was he that brought in the Private Finance Initiative with the NHS. It was he who ruined secondary education in the UK and brought student debt and student fees into upper education. Unfettered immigration, smashing of trade unions and trade union activity, grotesque house

price bubbles across the country, structural inequality, the advancement of neoliberalism. It is no wonder that Margaret Thatcher claimed that her biggest achievement was Blair and New Labour, is it?

**George Galloway:** Absolutely. And you left a few charges of the indictment there. He is also responsible for the selling of our gold at bargain basement prices.

**Ross:** I was putting that at Gordon Brown's door.

**George Galloway:** Well, it was Gordon Brown and Tony Blair that laid this plan together. But perhaps his biggest crime is that, through the light touch regulation, which effectively meant no regulation, he paved the way for the near economic collapse of this country in 2008. I recall vividly at Goldman Sachs, Tony Blair gave a speech in which he boasted that every plutocrat in that large reception hall at Christmas was paying less tax under him than they had paid under the aforementioned Margaret Thatcher. Blair and his friend, Bill Clinton, with the Glass Steagall Act and Blair and Brown with the light touch regulation, are directly responsible for the casino economics, the Rabelaisian rampage that bankers went on, which led to the collapse, and the now thirteen years of austerity that we have suffered as a result.

**Ross:** Let's finish on this burn after reading note that's come out. Now, back then, Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, was told to burn a memo written by the then Attorney General, Peter Goldsmith, that said the invasion of Iraq could be illegal. That memo apparently now is sitting in a safe somewhere in Whitehall or Westminster. Is that - and excuse the wordage here - but is that the smoking gun? Is that the moment where if actually that's broken open, we suddenly realise that these pack of lies can no longer hold?

**George Galloway:** Jonathan Powell, the man who sent the memo, the former chief of staff to Tony Blair, drew the difference without a distinction or the distinction without a difference, I should say, that he hadn't told Geoff Hoon, the then defence minister, to burn this memo, merely to destroy it, as if that made any difference. But Geoff Hoon didn't destroy it, he says. And, moreover, as you know, Ross, I recently made a film called Killing Kelly on the strange death of the British weapons expert Dr. David Kelly, Geoff Hoon told a very prominent Westminster journalist indeed, who published it in his book, that if he made a speech about the truth of the Dr David Kelly affair, the Prime Minister would have to leave office by 5pm this evening. So there's more than one smoking gun, it would seem. And Geoff Hoon seems to be in possession of two of them - the memo that he put in the safe - if he didn't copy it, I'm a Dutchman - and what he knows about Tony Blair and people around him and the death of David Kelly. How's that for two smoking guns? That would make a battle royal if Geoff Hoon was man enough to come forward and tell the public exactly what happened. So June the 13th is a long way off. This petition is well over one million and climbing. Our demonstration - I promise we will not back down - will be massive in Windsor, which has never seen a demonstration before. The walls of Windsor Castle will be reverberating with the anger of a huge crowd of British people of all political persuasions. Her Majesty would be well advised to think again about this, and Tony Blair, if he was a man at all, would save Her Majesty's blushes in this, the twilight of her long reign.

**Ross:** George Galloway, congratulations on your film Killing Kelly. I doubt we're going to see Sir George Galloway or Dame Gayatri.

**George Galloway:** Definitely not. You never will. And to paraphrase Alastair Campbell, I'm the People's Knight.

**Ross:** Always a pleasure, George. Thanks for your time.

**George Galloway:** Thank you, Ross.

**Video clip Sarah Jenkins:** Emily was apolitical. She was going to work and didn't care about politics at all and was murdered by, I suspect, young men that was so kind of brainwashed and soaked in a different kind of mentality, that we know very little about. I was painting in Clapham and my husband had rung up and said, Don't get a tube because there's been a power surge. And by that stage, everything had stopped. So I walked to my painting class and my daughter phoned to say that they were all safe. But Emily, as usual, was late for work, which she very often was. But I did have a strange feeling in the pit of my stomach. I was very, very uneasy and walked back to Clapham Station, and by that stage, my son had been alerted and met me there. And the rest was kind of trying to get home and knowing what to do. And there was no information. There was no help. One was at sea until police liaison officers arrived, which they did four days later. But up until then, my children and I was searching hospitals to see if she was amongst the injured. My daughter, Emily, was killed in the 7/7 bombings. I have strongly felt for the last 16 years the reason this happened was created by Tony Blair and Mr Bush, who went to war illegally, therefore giving great opportunities and reasons for terrorism to operate on our shores. It's odd because before if I'd looked at awful things that happened and people say they forgive the perpetrator. Forgive is a too strong a word, but I can understand the perpetrators. The person I cannot understand is Mr. Blair. My reaction to Tony Blair getting a gong is profound distaste, really, for the whole system. If the system is going to award Tony Blair a gong, it's got to be wrong. She was a very naughty girl but she was such fun. I miss the fact that she was the child that would come into the hall and just embrace me. And it's like having a hole in your heart. It's a good hole, but it should never be mended, because then Emily goes, if you mend that hole, so it's got to stay there. But it is a hole.

**Ross:** Lindsey German, great to have you back on Renegade Inc. Than you for joining us.

**Lindsey German:** You're very welcome. It's good to be here and lots to talk about.

**Ross:** Lindsey, you've been instrumental when it has come to Stop the War campaign. What is the general consensus among people who support Stop the War when they hear that Tony Blair is going to be honoured in these New Year's honours and be made Sir Tony Blair?

**Lindsey German:** Well, I think most people's reaction is similar to the one that I felt when I heard this late on New Year's Eve, which is absolute astonishment and really, really very strong opposition to it. As I'm sure you're aware, well over a million people have signed a petition on this subject, calling for the knighthood to be rescinded. It should be remembered this is the top honour in terms of knighthoods, if you follow all this kind of thing with the

very sort of obscure British honours system. But it is the highest honour that he could get. It's only given to a small number of people. It was announced on New Year's Eve, which is very unusual, apparently, and I think people feel that this is somebody who should be facing criminal proceedings because of his role in the war in Iraq. And this is at the end of a year when we've seen the defeat of the Western forces, including British forces, in Afghanistan. What message does this send to people that the person most identified with the war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq is being honoured in the way that he is. He'll be in Windsor receiving this honour in the summer and he'll be one of what, 60 or so people who have this honour. So it's quite astonishing, and it has created a big backlash against Blair.

**Video clip Kay Burley:** Why are one-point-one million people who signed a petition to say he should not get his knighthood, why are they all wrong?

**Labour's Jonathan Reynolds:** I wouldn't pay too much attention to that. I mean, I think if you set up a petition on that site saying hedgehogs are nice, you'd probably have six million people signing that by the end of the day. Look, Tony Blair is the best Prime Minister of my lifetime, and I'm not that young, to be frank. So if we're going to have an honours system, I think he absolutely deserves his knighthood.

**Lindsey German:** If you look at Labour MPs, there have always been quite a number of Labour MPs who have supported the various wars that have gone on in in recent years. It hasn't just been a Conservative thing. If you go back to the Falklands War, if you go back to the first Gulf War, the Kosovo war and of course, the war on terror, there's always been a sizeable Labour support for this. Now, of course, Tony Blair took that to a new level. And I think that's what this is about from Blairite MPs is really a mixture of that they don't want to remember what Tony Blair said because it isn't justifiable and the fact that they tend to be the people who agree with present wars and future wars. And that you will find, I think, when we're talking about China, when we're talking about Ukraine, when we're talking about Iran and the nuclear deal, you'll find some of the same people are the people who are saying we have to stand firm against whatever the latest supposed threat to Britain is. In other words, they're people who've supported these wars. And I think they see Blair not as a war criminal, as as many, many people do, but they see him as a sort of wronged and maligned hero, which couldn't be further from the truth, frankly. If you look at Afghanistan as the most recent example of this, think what happened over the summer and think about the way in which this was covered in the British media, the way in which the British government and the opposition responded to it. There was absolutely no sense that anybody had learnt anything about the conduct of the war. So it's we made a series of mistakes, usually blaming that on other people anyway. But it's always about mistakes, never about the idea that the war was wrong in the first place. And yet, even with Afghanistan, the first war in the war on terror, there was mass opposition to the war in Afghanistan. We had big demonstrations, there were lots of people against it. Iraq, we had two million people on the streets. They didn't listen to them. They're not listening to this petition of more than a million people, and what they don't understand is that this sentiment against Blair and the wider anti-war sentiment, goes very, very deeply in British society. And I think that this has only encouraged it even more. I think we'll find that the honour to Tony Blair will backfire once again, just as all the other things that they thought they would put the war behind them, just as those things have have also backfired on them.

**Ross:** So here's a resource for these people who can't learn, these Blairite MPs who have selective amnesia. Tony Benn. It's a different set of TB initials. Why don't they go back and read some of his speeches? Why don't they go back and listen to what he said in the House of Commons? Because all of it, bar none, is incredibly prescient stuff, especially when we come to taking the country to war in a far flung place in the Middle East?

**Lindsey German:** Yeah. Tony Benn has a great record on this. He was somebody who himself served in the Second World War, so obvious he had a long memory. He was very committed to the United Nations as a means of resolving conflict. He lost his older brother in the Second World War. All of these things were things which helped to form him, I think. And he was very strong and very principled against this. If you listen to his speech on the eve of war, you could make the case about a number of other MPs - Alice Mahon, Tam Dalyell, Jeremy Corbyn, George Galloway obviously - all of them made very strong speeches against the war. And if you look at their speeches now, they have been proved correct. You look at the speeches and the people who defended the war and justified it and were completely gung ho, they've been proved completely wrong. And yet we've never had an honest reckoning of these wars. And even when we had the Chilcot Report, which was the closest thing we got to that, what did Blair do on the same day when Jeremy Corbyn, quite rightly, was apologising for the war on behalf of the Labour Party, what was Blair doing? He had a lengthy, self-justifying, press conference where he essentially said he would do it all again, and he hadn't changed his mind. So I mean, this man is not only a criminal, but he's a dangerous criminal if he says this kind of thing.

**Ross:** What does this say to the rest of the world? Does it say that we've got a ruling elite, an establishment, that's really out of touch, really out of kilter with what's going on in the world, that we still think we own India, pretty much. We've got this imperial nature to us, and that we're just a warring nation and we can go around the place ignoring international law and just doing what we want? Because by anointing this guy, by lionising this guy saying Sir Tony, surely it says to everybody else in the world, the Brits have lost their mind. We saw what happened in Iraq. We know who's banged up in Belmarsh. We can see what's happening. These people are totally and utterly beyond redemption. They don't get it.

**Lindsey German:** That's absolutely right. And I think they have this view that Britain, you know, look at Boris Johnson. We're talking about Global Britain, so we send an aircraft carrier to the South China Sea. This is the kind of thing, you know, and it's very important for Britain at the moment, I think, to try to hang on to this faded imperial past, which is what it is. Britain is a medium sized country off the mainland of Europe, but it can't recognise this, and therefore it's always talking about how much it can get behind the United States, in particular, in terms of existing wars and future wars. And this is, you know, I think, to the rest of the world, it must look absolutely incomprehensible. But I think there's another issue which given we have big scandals going on with the present Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, what does it say to people about how much does a Prime Minister have to do wrong to ever suffer any kind of penalty for it?

**Ross:** How does this play out? Because it's clear that if we continue down this path, then the incredulity that the public rightly have is going to grow and total faith is going to be lost in

the elites. We can see that now with what's happening with Prince Andrew and others, this gong for Blair. How does this play out? What's your view on the end game here?

**Lindsey German:** Well, I think when people are this disillusioned with politics, obviously it means that lots of things they accepted for much of their lives are kind of exposed as not being the case. And I think it means people then look for political alternatives. One of the fears, I think anybody has - not so much in this country at the moment, but in a number of other countries - is the growth in the far right that we've seen in terms of offering a supposed alternative solution. So I think a major issue for people like me who are involved in campaigns, we've got left wing politics and who do all these kind of things, is how can the left present an alternative which can attract people who are disillusioned with this. And it seems to me we have to try to connect the international politics with the domestic policies. When people said to Jeremy Corbyn when he was leader of the opposition, don't do international politics, just stick with domestic stuff. I always thought that was a huge mistake because in this country, particularly with our policy of empire and everything else, international politics are domestic politics and they're very, very central to what we do. We are one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council and we've got nuclear weapons. We are, in that sense, a major player and it's very important that the people in this country link up what we do abroad with what our governments are doing to us at home.

**Ross:** Lindsey German, congratulations on all your work with Stop the War. Keep going. There's a huge silent majority out there behind you, and I'm sure they'll find you.

**Lindsey German:** Thanks very much and thanks for giving me the time to express these views.