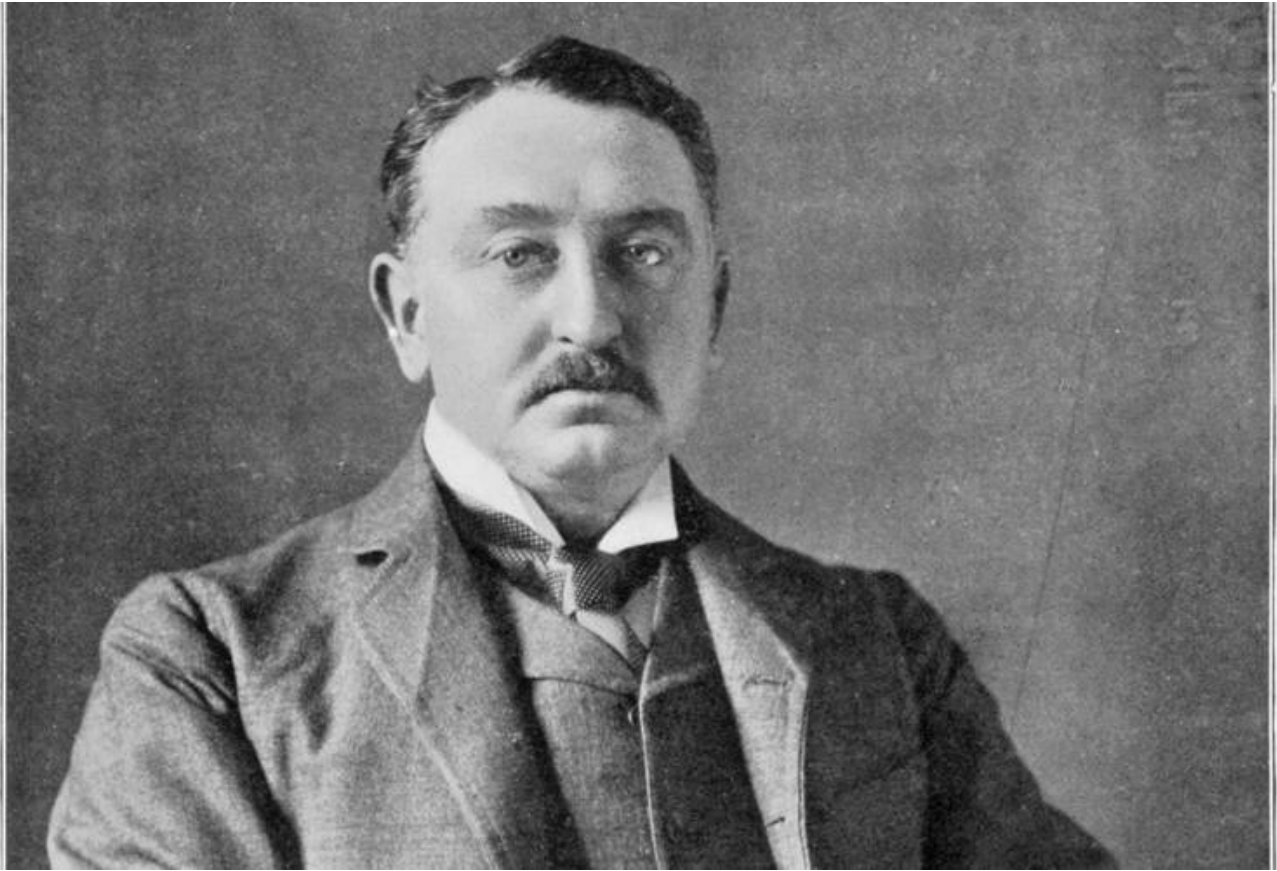


Hypocrisy of the Woke Dons

by Michael Curtis



Because of the increasingly bitter controversy and family rift with the Sussex duo, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, Queen Elizabeth II has ordered her courtiers to abandon the traditional royal policy of “never complain, never explain.” They should publicly correct any statements that misrepresent the conversations of the Queen or those of any other senior members of the Royal Family. This surprising unambiguous explicit injunction is applicable to the relentless untruths or irrelevant declarations of the ideological agenda of woke theology which is spreading in Western countries. The injunction could go further and scrutinize the personal behavior and interests of those who are engaged in cancel culture and fomenting political polarization and identity politics.

If a thing goes without saying it goes even better when being

said. First, it should be said that the main, indeed usually the only real, target of the woke brigade is the democratic Western world, primarily the U.S. and the UK and sometimes Israel. The woke brigade claim to be attacking past and present manifestations of colonialism and slavery, though the terms are not identical, but their accusations, while applied to Cecil Rhodes and other imperialists, are never related to the slave trade of the Ottoman Empire and its heritage, or to the oppression of the Rohingya by Burma, or the crimes of humanity by China against the Uyghur.

The woke attack is not only a diminution or ignoring of the positive contributions of the West but has also affected the self-confidence of the West in the attacks on the “oppressive” Western order. For example, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, U.S. ambassador to the UN since February 2021, has stated she had seen for herself how the “original sin of slavery weaved white supremacy into our founding documents and principles.” The U.S., she holds, is an imperfect union and has been since the beginning.

Britain has its dissenters. About 100 people who received honors, such as the OBE (Order of the British Empire) have campaigned in June 2021 to replace “Empire” with “Excellence.” The very latest target of the woke followers is the engineer James Watt, a key figure in the industrial revolution, the man who developed the idea of the steam engines and horsepower. Watt and his partner Matthew Boulton are held responsible for selling steam trains for slave plantations in the Caribbean. He is being reevaluated by the Birmingham City Council, but Glasgow University in 2019 condemned Watt for links to the slave trade. In contrast, King’s College, London in June 2021 has endorsed Teresa Cheng, a former graduate and Justice Minister in Hong Kong as a university fellow though she has been sanctioned in the U.S. for her role in suppressing democratic rights in Hong Kong.

The pandemic of wokery and aggressions in the culture wars has

infected British universities, especially Oxford, usually ranked as one of the top universities in the world. A few examples tell the tale. The Russell Group of 41 top British universities are acting to "decolonize" history courses, tackling diversity by anti-colonial curriculum, workshops in unconscious bias, and on site microwaves. History there will be taught from a variety of perspectives. The University of Brighton staff have training in equality and diversity.

At Cambridge, dons can be reported for raising an eyebrow when a black member of staff or student is speaking. It cautions against micro aggressions, slights, indignities, put downs, changes in body language when responding to a particular act, asking a minority person where are you really from, giving backhanded compliments, or referring to a woman as a "girl." This is tantamount to thought control.

The nadir of wokery in British universities is being exhibited at Oxford, largely but not wholly because of the decision of Oriel College not to remove the statue of Rhodes. As a result of a petition led by Professor Kate Tunstall, over a hundred dons have therefore decided to "withdraw all discretionary work and goodwill collaborations with Oriel."

This means refusing to give tutorials to Oriel undergraduates, refusals to interview prospective students, and refusing to attend or speak at talks and conferences sponsored by Oriel.

Dons in academia are supposed to be trained and intelligent people, and some doubtless are, but they have increasingly showed themselves to be offensive and ignorant. It is not enough for them that people are non-racists; they must also be active anti-racists.

A number of comments on the academic disasters are pertinent.

First, Oriel students may be fortunate they are not being taught by biased, opiniated, dogmatic, persons. It is difficult for undergraduates and others to see how refusal to

teach is relevant to any perceived ongoing effects of colonialism today. Secondly, the woke refusal is likely to be counterproductive: it is likely to lead to fewer individuals from deprived and minority backgrounds applying to Oxford. Thirdly, the woke actions in removing the portrait of Queen Elizabeth II can be seen as a gratuitous insult to the Queen in the context of changing perceptions of Britain as well as the monarchy.

What needs to be said is that academics at universities have benefited from the institutional order and wealth of the West. What is most striking and needs to be emphasized is both the lack of relation between the actions and the supposed concerns of the dons but also their fundamental hypocrisy. One can ask two questions. One is to ask if the non-teachers, opposed to Rhodes, and to others condemned as colonialists or imperialists, plan to give back to descendants of Rhodes and other condemned colonialists, the funding on which these dons live, or will they persist in keeping the money for themselves. The second is to discern the view of the woke brigade of the function of universities. Is it to teach in the best possible and objective way, or is it to indoctrinate an ideological conformity?

Most important for understanding academic wokery is examination of some of the leading individuals among the dons who feel they have no choice but to withdraw from teaching Oriel, and who are sickened by seeing Rhodes standing and are pleased by the removal of the picture of the Queen from a college room.

Literature is replete with hypocrites, false promulgators of virtue, especially those hoping for genuine and personal benefit: the gamut runs from Iago and Tartuffe to Julien Sorel, Elmer Gantry and Lord Voldemort. It is pertinent to ask if the wokish nonteachers are similar hypocrites who benefit financially and professionally at no cost to themselves. A few of the privileged dons can be examined.

Kate Tunstall, interim provost at Worcester College, home of Thomas de Qincey and Rupert Murdoch, is Clarendon Professor of French and Sir Lindsay Owen-Jones Fellow. The Clarendon professor is named after Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, statesman and diplomat, chief advisor of King Charles I. In 1663 a royal charter granted him, and seven others, colonial land in North America, that later became the province of Carolina. A few years later, 150 colonists were sent to Carolina. Clarendon and his son led forces against Indians in North Carolina, some of whom were taken prisoner and shipped off and sold as slaves.

Tunstall, member of the Labour Party and of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, which calls for the "freedom of the Palestinian people", has been outspoken on issues such as the killing of George Floyd and the BLM movement. Her anti-Rhodes petition means Oriel students would not have discussions in small groups or one on one sessions until Rhodes is toppled.

The Rhodes statue glorifies colonialism and the wealth it produced for Oriel, so "we feel we have no other choice but to withdraw "all discretionary work and goodwill collaboration" with Oriel. But she will not withdraw her own profitable Clarendon professorship.

Danny Dorling is Halford Mackinder Professor of human geography at the Oxford School of geography. Mackinder, first director of the School, was one of the founders of geopolitics and was a campaigner for the British Empire after both World Wars.

Agnieszka Koscianska, born in Poland, associate professor in the department of ethnology and cultural anthropology at the University of Warsaw, is a visiting professor fully funded, 150,000 pounds, by the Leverhulme Trust. Lord Leverhulme set up plantations in the Belgium Congo in the 1910s using forced labor, and many Africans died because of working conditions.

Dan Hodgkinson has a three year fellowship, the Early Career Fellowship at Oxford, entirely financed by the Leverhulme trust. Zoe Cormack, a member of the African Studies Center at Oxford, is also a completely financed Leverhulme fellow.

Wale Adebani is RHODES professor of race relations and a fellow of St. Anthony's College. The professorship was created in the early 1950s, following a donation from the Rhodes selection trust who asked for it to be named in memory of Cecil Rhodes.

Kathrin Bachleitner is the IKEA Foundation research fellow in international relations at Lady Margaret Hall. She is totally funded by IKEA which in 2012 admitted it had used East German political prisoners to manufacture goods during the Cold War.

Are any of the above members of the woke brigade ashamed of taking money derived from the colonialists they despise or are they self-denying hypocrites?