

Thoughts on Emma West
Sean Gabb, Libertarian Alliance

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Thoughts on Emma West:
How to Argue with the Ruling Class
by Sean Gabb

One of the ways in which a ruling class keeps control is its insistence on rules of debate that place opposition at a regular disadvantage. I cannot think of any time or place where opposition voices have been listened to on fully equal terms. In modern England, however, the ruling class and its various clients and useful idiots are particularly rigid in their shepherding of debate. This is so not only because England is an increasingly totalitarian place, but also because the main legitimisation ideologies are all obviously false and cannot be exposed to open criticism. Therefore, while speech mostly remains free in the legal sense, it will only be listened to when expressed in terms that privilege the ruling class.

Some of the rules of debate in England are linguistic. For example, if you refer to someone as a homosexual, you will be told that he is gay. Or you will be told that the Indian cities of Bombay and Calcutta must be called “Mumbai” and “Kolkata;” or that the native population of England must be called the “white majority;” or an immigrant a “migrant,” or a failed suicide a “self-harmer,” or a mongol a Downs syndrome sufferer. If you persist in using the now disapproved words, you may be dismissed as ignorant: you may be denounced as some kind of bigot. Sometimes, the words keep changing, or different words must be used depending on the audience – therefore, Ethiopian became person of colour, and then negro, and then Negro, and then coloured, and then black, and then Afro-Caribbean, and may still be any of these except possibly the third. In many cases, names are changed merely when something pejorative is replaced by something neutral – obviously so in the instance just given. More often, though, the changes are made to humble those outside the naming *elite*. Whoever must follow the other side’s naming conventions loses any claim to equality of status, and will at least tend to lose any debate. This is so when the shift of name is mostly verbal – for example coloured to black. But it is specially so when the shift involves an acceptance of new facts. See again the shift from “native English” to “white majority.” The former implies that a particular territory is historically the possession of a self-defined group, and suggests that this group has a right to continue in possession. The latter simply implies that one group among many has what may be a passing numerical weight. Equally, “migration” is so much softer and less threatening than “immigration.” Quibbling over words may sound petty. But to control the words usable in debate really is to have a very great if subtle advantage in debate.

A similar advantage is had by taking real or pretended offence, and calling on an opponent to apologise. When those crying out in horror have numbers or the power of

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government on their side, they can avoid the danger of arguing with an opponent by smashing his reputation. People are led to believe that he is a bad person. Often the person himself can be brought to agree. We saw how this can work last week. Speaking on a BBC programme that lies on the border between news and light entertainment, Jeremy Clarkson said that strikers in the public sector should be shot. No one but a fool could believe he intended this as other than a joke. But it raised a [storm of synthetic outrage](#). The BBC gave in at once and apologised for any offence caused. Mr Clarkson may or may not have apologised, but certainly did not stand his ground. His enemies are now circulating [rumours](#) that his mind is unbalanced, and the credibility of a prominent non-conformist may have been destroyed.

Or there are demands for “historic apologies.” The Celtic peoples are rather good at this. So are the Indians. [Peter Tatchell](#) made an effort last month to get the Prime Minister to apologise for the criminalisation of homosexual acts throughout the British Empire. He failed. But demanding apologies for alleged ill-treatment in the past is a good way to advance present interests. It smooths the way to actual financial or legal advantages. Or – as with the Irish – it just wins battles in a long-term vendetta.

Or there is the hiding of rights violations behind the grief of victims. Last week, for example, I put out my annual call for the repeal of the laws against drinking and driving. My argument is that the dangers of drinking and driving are much exaggerated – the published statistics are puffed up by including cases where drunken pedestrians or cyclists have got themselves knocked down. The present law is only enforced by stopping drivers at random and breathalysing them. This is a breach of the old common law rule against interference with individuals except with probable cause. Most of the people stopped do not test positive. Most of those who do test positive were not driving erratically. Enforcement also takes the police away from their – admittedly casual – protection of life and property. It would be better, I say, to punish drivers who are caught driving without proper care and attention, or who have hurt others, and to make sure that the punishments are harsh enough to deter.

I may be wrong about this. Perhaps the current law is the only way to keep the roads as safe as they are. Whatever the case, I nearly always find myself going on the wireless to debate with the grieving relatives of people killed by drunken drivers. Many years ago, I gave a blunt response to one of these people – that, while private grief must always be respected, it has no claim to respect when dragged into debates over law or policy of state. This sent everyone else in the studio into a self-righteous frenzy, and got my microphone turned off. My favourite response is to sympathise, and to show that, if I were given my way, the guilty driver would have been locked away for life, or even hanged. Usually, this gives me the advantage of surprise. Even so, I still have to ask for the moral endorsement of someone who is arguing for a police state.

And this brings me to what I really want to discuss – which is the demand for argument by supplication. Last week, Emma West was filmed swearing at a tram filled with black people. She was immediately punished by having her life destroyed. For those who, for

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whatever reason, have not heard about her, this brief statement of mine gives the main story:

Emma West is a white working class woman who got into an argument with some black people in a South London Tram. You can see the video here:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i47HoiM0Au8&feature=player_embedded

Miss West has now been arrested for her opinions and locked away, and her children have been taken away by the social services.

Of course, if she had been wearing a headscarf and screeching about the "kuffar" who were killing her brothers and sisters in Iraq/Afghanistan, the authorities would have looked the other way.

For a woman to have her children taken away because she expressed opinions disliked by the ruling class means we have come as close as doesn't matter to a totalitarian police state. I note that this has happened under a "Conservative" Government. Where are all those "Tory" MPs who like to preen themselves on how libertarian they are? Don't ask.

My view is that every single politician and official involved in this arrest of a dissident and legalised kidnapping of her children should be punished after the collapse of the present regime – not only sacked and deprived of pension rights (because they all will be in the disestablishment of the ruling class), but also made jointly and severally liable for compensating Miss West and her children for whatever they may have suffered.

I have quoted this in full not only because it gives the main facts of the case, but also because it brought a response that I was hoping to provoke someone into making. It came last Friday:

Sean

While the punishment meted out to this racist idiot is indeed unacceptable what is remarkable is that you should spring to her defence without disassociating yourself clearly from the contemptible views she espouses. More remarkable still is that you propose that every politician and official involved should be punished, deprived of their pension rights and held liable for compensating Miss West

Scratch a "free market anti-statist" and you will invariably find a statist lurking within

For non-market anti-statist socialism

Xxxxx Yyy

Now, the writer of this is not a member of the ruling class. He may or may not be one of its clients. But he certainly comes into the category of useful idiot. Leave aside his

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assumption that a society can hold together by any other means than voluntary association or compulsion by the State – what interests me is his outrage that I did not join to my defence of Miss West’s rights a denunciation of what she said. Increasingly, you are only allowed to defend those persecuted by the ruling class by abasing yourself before the ruling class. Somewhere in what I said, I should have added a variant on the following:

I bow to no one in my utter revulsion of what this evil young guttersnipe said. Being myself a transgendered black lesbian, I have had more than my share of hate-filled bigotry. And I celebrate the immense patience shown by those poor abused people. That no one was driven to violence against West is proof of how strong our diverse and multicultural society has become. All this being said, it is only out of an old-fashioned, and therefore possibly misguided, liberalism that I beg for her not to suffer the full consequences of her totally abhorrent crime against humanity.

Well, I knew that I was expected to come out with this kind of dirt-kissing exercise, and I refused to comply. I refused, because it is inhuman to spit on someone who has already been brought down. I refused because a defence of someone’s rights is often compromised by adverse comment on what he has done. The paraphrase on Voltaire – “I disagree with what you say, but would defend to the death your right to say it” – is all very well when arguing with someone on the other side of a dinner table. My own view, when someone is lying on the ground, is to skip the disagreement.

This has always been my practice. In 1991, I wrote the first and one of the best [defences of the “Spanner 15”](#) – that is, of the homosexual men who were tried and punished for consensual acts in private: one of them was convicted of “aiding and abetting an assault on himself!” Not once in any of the essays I wrote or the speeches I made did I insist that I was not myself a leather-worshipping sado-masochistic homosexual, or that I would not like someone to drive a four inch nail through my penis. I got some very funny looks for this omission. But I refused then to distance myself from powerless and ruined victims of injustice – and I refuse now.

I also refuse because what is demanded of me is an endorsement of a legitimising ideology. Here – and for the sake of clarity alone – I will explain what I think of Miss West’s actions. She was vulgar in her speech and uncharitable in her sentiments. But I do not for a moment think that, except for her and people like her, what has been made of my country would be a vibrant love feast without end. While modern commerce and modern technology almost cry out for some mixing of peoples, state-sponsored mass-immigration has been made an excuse to destroy the internal cohesion of my people and to free my rulers from practical accountability. That a quarter of this country’s population may now be strangers, who have been encouraged neither to adopt nor even to respect our ways, is a problem to which I can think of no satisfactory answer. But I refuse, when speaking out against their growing intolerance of disagreement, to bow my head to the people who rule this country. They are not good people led astray by bad ideas. They do not occupy any moral high ground. Until such time as they grow more tyrannical than they have yet become, I will avoid arguing with them on their terms. What they have

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done to us is evil in itself, and, because it is highly unstable, it will almost certainly lead to greater evils. The least bad outcome will be a swift collapse of the *regime* they have created, and their punishment with some regard given to due process. And they deserve no less. They are in a position to know exactly what they are doing. If they have chosen not to make the obvious connections of cause and effect, their ignorance is culpable.

Because, more than is usually the case, it is founded on lies and violence, the present *regime* must eventually collapse. I have no inclination to join some future equivalent of storming the Bastille. Something I can do, though, is to look these people in the face, and refuse to observe their rules of debate. The purpose of these rules is to restrain a debate that would otherwise turn dangerous. No revolution has ever succeeded except after there had been a withdrawal of consent. Let this be withdrawn, and the secret of all power is laid bare – that we are many and they are few. There is little else I will do. But, however small it may be in the overall scheme of things, this much i have done already.