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The story of the forgotten dictator

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20th August 2017

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Picture the scene. An authoritarian ruler dissolves Parliament for eleven years, when he is forced to bring back, it lasts three weeks, a second attempt results in a Civil War, as this ruler disagrees with parliament and even attempts to arrest five members for high treason.





One man leads the Parliamentarians in this war. This man would later remove all those who disagreed with him within Parliament, imprisoning them for a short while before barring them. This was in order for him to win a majority.

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One man leads the Parliamentarians in this war. This man would later remove all those who disagreed with him within Parliament, imprisoning them for a short while before barring them. This was in order for him to win a majority.

The autocratic ruler, who happens to be a King, is executed, despite there being no legal means to do so. He is guilty of treason, a crime he cannot be legally tried for. But, by removing dissidents this so-called parliamentarian manages to do so.

He also later dissolves the upper chamber of Parliament.

He installs himself as ruler of the nation, propped up by this rump government that he has created by force.

His title is Lord Protector. A title which sounds mythological. As though, he is some kind of primordial God, sent from the heavens to protect the mere mortals that inhabit his nation. He names his son, as his successor, gives himself the power to award knighthoods, sounds rather like a monarchy doesn't it?

As Lord Protector, he would later ban theatre, drinking, celebrating Christmas, even some forms of the arts, gambling, sports, makeup and even working on Sundays.

He was full of religious zeal and forced his puritanical views on the people. After all, as he would have argued, pointless enjoyment doesn't get you into heaven.

Worst still, was his treatment of Catholics during wars in two neighboring countries. Historians debate just what he was responsible for but the facts remain that his armies massacred civilians, Catholics were transported as slaves to colonies in the Caribbean and they had their land forcibly removed.

His son, who become Lord Protector upon his death, would later resign due to his inability to rule, the barred members finally returned and the monarchy was restored. The former King's son was to return and the monarchy would eventually evolve into the constitutional one it is today.

Later, Winston Churchill would go as far as calling the original Lord Protector a military dictator in his *A History of English Speaking Peoples*.

Even after all this his statue still stands tall in front of the Parliament whose sovereignty he fought to defend, only to then undermine it as soon as he could.

The name of this man who forced oppressive laws on his people with no prerogative and targeted Catholics?

This isn't North Korea or Nazi Germany.

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His name is Oliver Cromwell, the nation is England and the Catholics he oppressed were from Ireland and Scotland.





You see learning about Cromwell in Year 4 was interesting, at the beginning, learning of the transgressions of Charles I, Cromwell did seem like he was on the cusp of becoming a hero, a founder of democracy.

But, his actions towards the end of the Civil War and after, were anything but the actions of such a character. The Pride Purge, the events that saw members barred is anything but democratic, if that occurred today, there would be protests outside Embassies around the world and in the streets.

Cromwell may have started off with good intentions, but he did not see them through.

His title of Lord Protector was the same as King in everything but name. As soon as he got into power, he became the very thing he claimed to stand against. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.

His puritanical laws curbed freedoms, a mix of politics with religion, which actually when it comes down to it, conflicts with the idea of democracy. Everyone is supposedly equal, so how can one religious group have a higher status and be able to influence laws more freely? Democracy can only be truly obtained with secularism. Cromwell's Britain was most certainly not secular.

This religious belief may have influenced his treatments of Catholics in Ireland and Scotland which amounted to ethnic cleansing, religious persecution and could even be called a



genocide. It was barbaric and as military and political commander, he must shoulder responsibility for the brutal ordeal forced upon thousands of innocent people for their religious beliefs.

I surely don't have to tell you why that is wrong. Britain takes pride in its liberation of Bergen-Belsen at the end of the Second World War, yet the fact that this statute remains implying as though his actions are something to be proud of is horrid.

The only crime of the civilian victims of his conquest of Ireland was the fact that they believed in a different branch of Cromwell's religion. The beauty of democracy is that the people can do that without any fear of persecution at all.

Cromwell is revered by some as a father of British democracy but he isn't. He had the potential to be, but he failed to fulfill it. Instead, he was cruel and committed acts that are impossible to justify.



When it comes to it, I have to admit, the physical presence of his statue does not bother me so much. After all, it will not erase what he did, however, that it contributes to a viewpoint of him as some sort of hero, like an earlier George Washington, Simon Bolivar or Mustafa Kemal Ataturk is what angers me.

The singer Morrissey, himself of Irish descent wrote a song that contained the lyrics: "I've been dreaming of a time when/ The English are sick to death of Labour and Tories/ And spit upon the name Oliver Cromwell/ And denounce this royal line/That still salute him and will salute him forever."

It's hard to disagree with him. What happened in the 1640s and 1650s under Cromwell are dark stains on the nation's past, and yet some seem willing to forget his evil deeds and paint him as a hero. This is wrong and it should stop.

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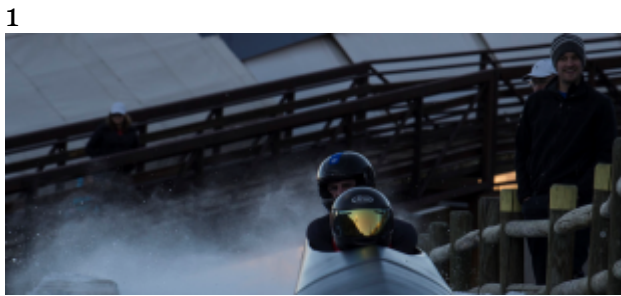
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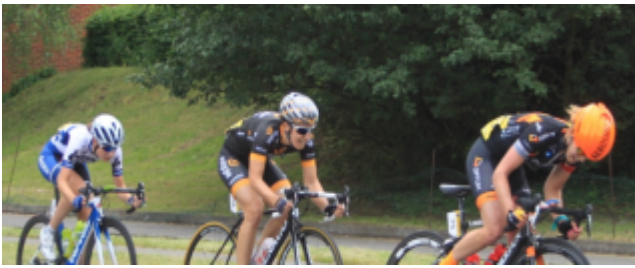
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