British Parliamentarians Promoting Tragedy

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I rarely watch television in Sri Lanka, but in the long lonely nights in Geneva, when I am too tired to write yet another critique of some silly assault on the Sri Lankan state, I find myself looking for English language programmes. Recently I have been struck by the number of British television dramas dealing with terrorism. Many of them feature police teams fighting for decency as well as the British way of life, sometimes battling politicians who are engaged in all sorts of wicked deals.

They are generally about Islamic terrorism, though sometimes they deal with anarchists or even British neo-Nazis. I remember particularly the portrayal of a fundamentalist who convinced the Brits that a moderate Muslim prince was a terrorist leader, and killed him when he had him brought before him for interrogation. More recently there was a Minister who had sold dud red mercury to a group that was holed up in a restaurant with hostages plus the bomb the Minister knew was useless. Not entirely surprisingly, I have not yet seen anything about Tiger terrorism. This still remains a romance to the British, with many politicians falling over themselves to pretend that this is good terrorism, that it is somehow acceptable that the Tigers should use child soldiers and suicide bombers because theirs is a struggle for freedom. The sheer horror of the double standards involved came home to me when I read the account in TamilNet of the tributes to their latest hero, Murugathasan Varnakulasingham, who 'self-immolated in front of the United Nations in Geneva in protest at the international inaction amid the mass killings of Tamils by the Sri Lankan military.' The article said that the BBC said that the British Tamil Councillors and Associates group said that 'This man died not for himself but for us.' It was also claimed, though whether by the BBC or the Councillors or simply TamilNet is not clear, that 'Mr Varnakulasingham's family have said they were proud of his actions.' Despite this it was reported that 'His mother has been inconsolable since his death'. That phrase stuck in my mind, because it suggested the human being behind the hype, the personal anguish that the Tigers did not care about provided they could get their point across. Several people therefore valorised the action, including his brother-in-law, the Chairman of the Councillors and an assembly member for Brent and Harrow. One could only feel sorry for the Tamils amongst them, for such bitterness cannot be pleasant, the fact that they probably genuinely feel that there is nothing wrong, in comparison with what they might achieve for their cause, with encouraging such human sacrifices. What was ghastly though was the British MP who turned up at the funeral to support such a course, in assuring those present that 'You may lose a battle, you may lose a skirmish, but you will not lose the war.' He went further and declared that 'My country is part of the problem, and we must be part of the solution. We recognise genocide is a crime, not just against your people but a crime against all humanity. I promise you we cannot, must not, and will not stand by and let this slaughter continue.' It was not clear what slaughter he meant, since he is likely to turn up to another such funeral too. But had Mr. Pound bothered to think about it, he must have realised that it was unlikely that the poor young man's decision was spontaneous. He had travelled to Geneva with several others for the event, and had prepared a five-page letter which was 'found nearby after he self-immolated on Feb 13'. It is likely then that, following what would to a perverse mind seem the success of the funeral, there will be pressure on others to follow suit. We are after all talking about an organisation that has made suicide bombing an art and forces children into combat. It would be naïve then to think that the stage is not being set for more of the same, if more people can be persuaded to sacrifice themselves. What should happen is an investigation of what went on before the fatal moment, whether there was any encouragement of this dramatic suicide. But with a British MP giving the act his blessing as it were, the police who strive so valiantly on British television to protect the British way of life are unlikely to take a stand against this time of crime.

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