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No mencione la guerraDon't mention the war

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Dos gorilas de Tony Blair maltratan a un militante de 82 años que criticaba la guerra de Irak.

Por Walter Oppenheimer

[El País](#). Madrid, 30 de septiembre de 2005



Walter Wolfgang, de 82 años y casi 60 de militancia laborista, logró huir de la Alemania nazi, pero no pudo eludir el miércoles a los gorilas que controlan la seguridad del congreso del Partido Laborista en Brighton. Wolfgang fue expulsado de mala manera por atreverse a gritar "Tonterías" cuando el ministro de Exteriores, Jack Straw, defendía los logros de la intervención angloamericana en Irak.

El mal trago tuvo una recompensa : una cascada de disculpas del Partido Laborista a las que se sumó Tony Blair, algo que pocos consiguieron. Primero se disculpó el miércoles por la noche el presidente del partido, Ian McCartney. Ayer por la mañana lo hizo el primer ministro en la BBC y luego lo repitió desde el estrado el ministro de Defensa, John Reid.

El incidente acaparó las primeras páginas de la prensa. Las imágenes de Wolfgang mientras dos gorilas de más de dos metros le sacaban a empujones se han convertido en la peor propaganda posible para Blair. ["No menciones la guerra"](#), titulaba The Independent. "Libertad de expresión en la Gran Bretaña de Blair", proclamaba The Daily Mail.

Wolfgang explicó que los servicios de seguridad le querían sacar del edificio a empujones y tuvo que pedirles que le dejaran salir por su propio pie. Cuando quiso volver a entrar la policía se lo impidió apelando a la legislación antiterrorista. Horrible coincidencia, el incidente se produjo el mismo día en que la familia del brasileño Jean Charles de Menezes visitaba el lugar donde la policía le mató de siete balazos.

Obsesión por la seguridad



La expulsión de Wolfgang pone de relieve no sólo la obsesión por la seguridad sino la evolución misma del Partido Laborista en los últimos años. Hace 20 años los congresos eran una tumultuosa cita de debate en la que no faltaban abucheos y pataleos. Ahora el aparato controla hasta el último detalle para convertirlos en un foco de propaganda

para el líder y abortar cualquier iniciativa que se desvíe de la posición oficial. Es quizás un reflejo de los motivos que llevaron al Partido Laborista a perder a la mitad de sus militantes en los últimos cinco años.

Bastó una sola palabra, "¡Tonterías!", para echar por tierra varios meses de meticuloso trabajo en las sombras del poder. Una vez más, la guerra de Irak se convirtió en una fuente de problemas para Blair. Todo estaba preparado para evitar que el conflicto acaparara este año los titulares de los periódicos. El aparato había abortado los intentos de un sector de la militancia de convocar un debate y luego una votación sobre Irak. Blair apenas la mencionó en su tedioso discurso del martes e impidió que el Congreso votara una moción en recuerdo de Robin Cook, el ex ministro de Exteriores y más brillante opositor a la guerra.

Miembro de la coalición Parada la Guerra y activista antinuclear, Wolfgang comentó ayer : "Lo que me ocurrió es una pequeñez al lado del inmenso error que supone la guerra de Irak".

DON'T MENTION THE WAR

Delegate, 82, manhandled from Labour conference for a single word of criticism to Jack Straw on the issue that the Government refuse to discuss in Brighton

By Ben Russell and Andrew Grice

[The Independent](#) London, 29 September 2005

The Labour Party was forced to make a humiliating apology to an 82-year-old party member last night after he was thrown out of the conference for heckling Jack Straw.

Walter Wolfgang, a party member for 57 years, was bundled out of the conference hall by stewards after shouting "nonsense" as Mr Straw, the Foreign Secretary, defended Britain's role in Iraq. He was later stopped under anti-terrorist powers as he tried to re-enter the hall.

The heavy-handed treatment of Mr Wolfgang revived criticism of the "control freakery" associated with New Labour and even drew comparisons with the way the Communist leaders in Russia and China stifled dissent.

Mr Wolfgang fled Nazi Germany as a teenager for the freedom of Britain. He said : "I shouted out 'nonsense'. That's all I said. Then these two toughies came round and wanted to manhandle me out. 'I said : 'Do you want me to leave ? I will leave, you don't need to manhandle me.'

"Physically, I am not too well, so I said I would follow them."

In what Tony Blair's anti-war critics have called the "don't mention the war" conference, the party avoided a separate debate and vote on Iraq and the Prime Minister made only a short reference to the issue in his keynote speech. Mr Blair also blocked a motion for the conference to pay tribute to Robin Cook, the cabinet minister who resigned over the war and died in August. Yesterday's protest was muted by Labour's standards, but the over-reaction by conference stewards backfired and turned into a public relations disaster for the party.

Steve Forrest, the chairman of the Erith and Thamesmead Labour Party, was also ejected for protesting at Mr Wolfgang's treatment. Angry delegates demonstrated at the removal of the two men as Mr Straw made an

unapologetic defence of British policy in Iraq.

Mr Wolfgang, a prominent member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, said : "Most of the Labour Party stewards are very nice people. One or two people lend themselves to this nonsense. It makes me feel that the people who resort to these tactics are very unsure of themselves and they are on the losing side."

Mr Forrest said : "I literally said 'hear, hear' twice. Later, this gentleman shouted 'nonsense'. It was just the voicing of an opinion and they grabbed hold of him. I said : 'You leave him alone, he is an old man' and five stewards pulled me out of the centre. They've taken my pass away and they won't let me back into the conference centre."

Delegates forced an investigation by the party's conference arrangements committee into the incident. A Mole Valley delegate, Carol Hayton, said : " We are very concerned about the way in which a gentleman of more than 80 was manhandled from the balcony. Perhaps more appropriate action could have been taken but this was an 80-year-old gentleman and I am sure that Jack Straw, a politician of great experience, is able to deal with events of this kind without that kind of response from our stewards."

Linda Riordan, the MP for Halifax, added : "You can't stop ordinary members of the Labour Party having a debate about Iraq. It's not taking place in the conference hall, but it is going on in the bars and the corridors."

After initially defending its actions, Labour admitted Mr Wolfgang had been wrongly treated. Ian McCartney, the party chairman, said : "We apologise for the inappropriate way he was removed." A Labour spokesman said : " The Labour Party reserves its rights to remove from the conference site people who cause a persistent disturbance. However, it is clear from TV footage that the way in which Mr Wolfgang was removed was inappropriate."

When the Prime Minister was asked by a journalist whether he would apologise to Mr Wolfgang, he did not comment.

Mr Wolfgang was later greeted as a hero when he appeared at a rally of left-wingers in Brighton. His security pass has been taken away, but he intends to attend the conference's final day today.

Earlier Barry Camfield, the assistant general secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, accused the Government of allowing itself to act as a "crutch" for President George Bush over Iraq. He won loud applause as he declared : "Our troops should be pulled out now and quickly." He received more applause when he said : "I ask you in all conscience : are 100,000 civilian dead a price worth paying ? Are the scores of British soldiers dead a price worth paying ?"

How other delegates reacted :

* "It was a dreadful overreaction by the stewards, who were understandably concerned about security" Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt

* "The stewards behaved completely inappropriately" Liam Byrne, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Care Services

* "The treatment was ... tactless and unnecessary." Linda Riordan, MP for Halifax

* "The Labour Party reserves the right to remove people who cause a persistent disturbance" Labour party

spokesperson

* "It's heavy handed for people to be ejected" John Austin, MP