

Dan Snow – Under the Weather

Snow entitles his March 14th 2015 article for the *Daily Telegraph*:

‘The French should end their love affair with Napoleon – he was an utterly brutal and callous dictator.’

Snow writes as if he’s addressing teenagers in a history comic. His grasp of world events is superficial and his knowledge of Napoleon virtually non-existent. His copy reveals a naive exuberance from someone who can’t believe he is writing for a national newspaper, leave alone the fact he is the BBC’s latest ‘historian’.

He states that: ‘Americans annihilated a race of people as they forged a vast empire...’ No they didn’t, there are tens of thousands of Native Americans still alive and flourishing. What he should have said was - there was mass genocide of the natives by Spaniards and later by other white Europeans. Does he know what the word annihilate means? To help him out - the dictionary definition is ‘destroy completely’.

He then describes the Vikings ‘whose dragonships penetrated Europe’s great rivers like poison moving through arteries.’ Rather a derogatory comment for someone who presents programmes for the ultra PC BBC. He is trying to be clever with words and as a result he waves his own ignorance like a flag. The Vikings travelled to America; founded York and Dublin; started a colony in Greenland; formed part of the Byzantine Varangian Guard; conquered England and gave Alfred the Great a good run for his money. The Swedish Vikings – the Rus – gave their name to Russia. But none of this is hinted at in Young Snow’s phrase comparing them to ‘poison moving through arteries.’

He then turns his adolescent history awareness to Napoleon and says with complete impartiality: ‘Two hundred years ago this month, the deposed Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte was rampaging north of Paris, intent on seizing back power.’ Wrong on all counts. Napoleon was not deposed, he had abdicated in 1814, and he already *had* power in 1815 after his triumphal return to Paris without a shot being fired. Napoleon was immeasurably more popular than the twenty stone *Bungy* Louis XVIII who had never been voted for by anyone – unlike Napoleon with his plebiscites – and still thought he had a divine right to rule because his porky majesty just happened to be dubbed a Bourbon.

What Snow really deserves to be taken to task for is not even mentioning that Napoleon wrote personally to all the main rulers in Europe asking for *peace* after his return to France – the exact opposite of ‘rampaging’. His letter to the Prince Regent was never even given to that obese alcoholic opium addict who spent thousands of pounds on his clothes and palaces while millions of ordinary British people didn’t even have enough to eat. The reason taxes in England were sky high was because the corrupt British Cabinet was hell bent on fomenting war with Napoleon with every chance they could get. Pitt and his cabal of ultra-rich aristocratic accomplices paid for numerous attempts to kill Napoleon. These assassination attempts were nothing less than state-sponsored terrorism. Napoleon believed it beneath his dignity to respond in kind.

Britain paid for Austria and Russia to attack France in 1805 and for most of the other so-call Coalitions; Prussia declared war on France in 1806; the Russians attacked first in 1807; the Austrians invaded Bavaria, Napoleon’s ally in 1809 without a declaration of war thinking Napoleon too preoccupied in Spain; Russia hoped to

attack Napoleon's ally the Grand Duchy of Warsaw in 1811 but could get no support from the usual suspects. Then, in 1815 the Allies having illegally proscribed Napoleon personally as an outlaw (thereby encouraging yet more assassination attempts), declared war on *him* as an individual. They would never have dreamt of treating a member of the old Royalty in such a cruel and offhand manner. Their hatred of the French Revolution and their fear of universal human rights spreading to their own backward and repressive countries were so great that they wanted to destroy the one man who freed all Jews in his Empire and gave them equal rights and who allowed people to rise on their own merits unlike the petrified feudal systems that prevailed everywhere else on the Continent.

Young Snow is wrong in nearly everything he says.

He thus compounds his ignorance when he states that in 1815 soldiers faced: 'a fate... condemned by his ambition.' Was it Napoleon's ambition that led Canning to order an attack on neutral Copenhagen in 1807? The British Navy bombarded the benighted civilians of Denmark with Congreve Rockets, the first occasion when Weapons of Mass Destruction were ever used on a civilian population. Criminal British politicians and WMD have a long history. The British forces then stole the Danish navy or burnt the remaining vessels they were unable to seize. During the same campaign Wellington had a great victory over clog wearing civilian militia. What a stirring military victory that was for Britannia!

Was it Napoleon's ambition that led Nelson to execute Admiral Caraccioli and dozens of unarmed Neapolitan rebels in 1799 who had been promised freedom after they had surrendered? Coming late to the scene Nelson persuaded the Bourbon rulers – at Emma Hamilton's insistence – to renege on the previous agreement and execute the poor souls who were rotting alive on ships in Naples' harbour. Ah yes - another British triumph! Nelson actually was a titch unlike Napoleon. Our odious midget admiral stood 5 feet two inches tall as opposed to Napoleon's 5 feet six. But Emma Hamilton loved him despite the fact he had precious few teeth, one arm and only one eye. She loved him to bits.

For this massacre Nelson was given £3,000 a year and the Duchy of Bronte by his Bourbon hosts. He was condemned for his actions even by Robert Southey his first biographer and a creature of the Establishment: 'a faithful historian is called upon to pronounce a severe and unqualified condemnation of Nelson's conduct.' (page 195 *Life of Nelson*). However, Nelson himself gushed to Emma Hamilton: 'I am now perfectly the *great man* – not a creature near me.' In bald truth – Nelson was a murderer.

Don't we all just love British fair play? But we certainly don't get it with Young Snow.

Was it Napoleon's ambition that led the United States to declare war on England in 1812 because the Royal Navy claimed the right to board every neutral vessel and seize cargoes that might help the French? No the overweening arrogance of those in power in this country led them to believe they could do whatever they wanted. In fact, believing in might is right, they often could. Britain was the great oppressor in those days – starting at home with its own people, who were imprisoned or transported to Australia, merely for asking for the vote and a few human rights of their own. Some were even massacred by mounted thugs working for the local magistrates, like at Peterloo in 1819. How ironic that one soldier who fought against Napoleon at Waterloo was scythed down by his own militia back in Manchester!

Yes, *everything* is Napoleon's fault!

Snow ought to read a little more, or indeed *anything*, about what happened to the Unitarians during the time of those he lauds so much. William Hazlitt has eloquently described the torments and terrors inflicted upon its own population by the self-serving creatures in Parliament at the time of Napoleon. Hazlitt wept when Napoleon died. Snow's whitewashing of British history provokes tears of laughter from this historian.

Snow claims that Napoleon: 'abandoned his army in the depths of a Russian winter.' Wrong again. As Bourgoigne describes in his superb account of the retreat from Russia, Napoleon had heard of the Malet conspiracy back in Paris and his senior officers knew that his place was back in the capital where he could restore order and try and recoup from a disastrous campaign. Bourgoigne also mentions British spies at work in Poland. One would expect them to twist the facts at a time of war – there is no excuse for Snow to do the same now.

Snow says: 'Napoleon, Caesar, Clive, perhaps even Churchill, are heroes for an age that is past.' Isn't it a tad arrogant for a 37-year-old who has never lived through a major war, certainly one with such a poor grasp of history, to tell the rest of us what we should think? To my father's generation Churchill will always be a hero because of the morale effect of his radio speeches during the War. Caesar boasted of being personally responsible for the death of a million Gauls. Caesar was only a hero to himself. Clive of India is unknown to most British people today. Indeed, the general state of historical knowledge in this country is dire. And Snow went to Balliol – rather proving the point. History as a subject has not been taught well, if at all, in our schools for years.

Then we come to a real Snowism: 'Napoleon was a brilliant commander, an able administrator, a man *who bent to the arc of history with the heat of his desire.*' Just *what* exactly is that supposed to mean? Don't they teach English at Oxford? And what does it say for the linguistic appreciation of the *Daily Telegraph* when they print such asinine drivel?

Snow continues with his character assassination, saying that Napoleon was 'a man who made legions of widows, orphans and invalids as he pursued his version of destiny.' As if all those Danish civilians were blaming Napoleon in 1807! Napoleon was on Saint Helena being poisoned by Montholon in 1819 when the Manchester militia cut down peaceful, unarmed men, women and children who had come together merely to discuss the future of their country. Hasn't Snow read anything?

Napoleon wrote to the Prince Regent asking for peace in early 1805 – *months* before Trafalgar. The historian Walter Runciman has described how the British Government arrogantly refused even to respond to Napoleon's attempt to make peace. Snow began his diatribe by claiming that Napoleon was 'a brutal and callous dictator.' Runciman states that had that been so, Napoleon would have executed the duplicitous Monarchs whose armies constantly attacked him and which were usually defeated by him, but instead he forgave them time after time, even marrying Maria Louise the daughter of his longtime enemy Austria. Napoleon repeatedly tried to engage with the old aristocratic families of Europe. He let émigrés return to France and with his own Legion of Honour he tried to install a deserving meritocracy in place of the old traditional aristocracy.

As to being 'callous' – the first thing Napoleon did at the start of the retreat from Russia was to give up his own coach for the wounded. In Coignet's biography we see him repeatedly describing the Emperor's efforts to care for the wounded. With Jean Larrey, Napoleon had the best surgeon in Europe at that time and Larrey made sure the French Army was the first to have a proper ambulance chain. When one of his

mounted officers disturbed a wounded Russian soldier after the battle of Borodino, the man cried out, the French officer saying that it was only a Russian. Napoleon reproached him and added: 'After a victory there are only men.'

When did Wellington ever give up his coach for a mere soldier? He notoriously called his men 'scum'. The only useful thing that arrogant Irishman left for posterity was a name for his boots. To him, the common soldier was something to be scraped from the bottom of them. Napier, another Irishman, writer of the monumental *History of the Peninsula War* and on Wellington's side during England's wars against Napoleon lamented that ordinary British soldiers were never even 'seen' by their leaders. Their heroic acts were always anonymous and went unrewarded. The ordinary British footslogger was never given a medal and if he was a Catholic he could never become a general. There was no religious discrimination in Napoleon's Army. Napier compared this blatantly hierarchical system to that of the French under Napoleon and very much preferred the latter.

To Goethe Napoleon was the greatest man of the C19th. To the German Jew Heine he was the greatest man who ever lived. Nietzsche admired him. Napoleon has given his name to over a dozen settlements in the United States. Around 1,000 books a year are written about him – including my own *The Real Napoleon – The Untold Story*: over 250,000 now in total. He died in 1821, less than two hundred years ago. Two of my grandparents were born in 1881 and 1890. That is how *recent* he was alive. And most educated people today have heard of Napoleon – even though his name is often traduced and scorned and manifest lies and misrepresentations are constantly made about him.

I shall finish with another Snowism - a whole paragraph this time. Our young 'historian' in full flow says: 'Many people, understandably, are sympathetic to anyone, even Napoleon, who threatened the continued domination of Europe by a caste of befeathered Emperors and Prince Bishops. However, as 1918 was to show, the violent removal of this anachronistic vestige did not lead to fully fledged Lockean liberal states springing like Athena from the forehead of Zeus.'

Don't you just wish you could write like that? Alas our cub historian tries too hard to impress and instead just spouts a load of drivel. And who is Dan Snow to say that what happened in 1918 has absolutely *anything* to do with Napoleon? It beggars believe that such a pathetically one-sided piece can actually get published in one of our national papers. And what's more there's more Snow on the BBC than on the winter steppes of Russia - and paid for by compulsory licence fee!

As Napoleon would say: 'Bah!'

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