

OPINION · OP-EDS

OP-ED

Philip Colley
Great-nephew and literary executor
of journalist Gareth Jones

Philip Colley, great-nephew of journalist Gareth Jones: 'My great- uncle's legacy must be preserved, but not at the expense of the truth'

Journalist Gareth Jones, who brought to light Stalin's famine in Ukraine in 1932-1933, frequented Nazi dignitaries. Nazi Germany used his revelations to feed their propaganda. His great-nephew argues that erasing these aspects of his life does 'neither justice to his memory nor his journalistic integrity.'

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Gareth Jones, January 14, 1935. DEA / BIBLIOTECA AMBROSIANA / DE AGOSTINI VIA GETTY IMAGES

Much has come to light in recent years about the Welsh journalist Gareth Jones. He has been lauded as an uncompromising reporter for the part he played in exposing Stalin's man-made famine of 1932-33. Until my late mother published her book *More Than A Grain of Truth* in 2005, precious little was known about Gareth outside of his immediate family. Agnieszka Holland's 2020 feature film, *Mr. Jones*, and the 2023 documentary *Les Moissons Sanglantes*, have brought Gareth's endeavors to a wider audience. But there are uncomfortable truths in his story that those now wanting to tell it seem determined to ignore.

The recent call in *Le Monde*, on April 17, for a prize to honor his name as a champion in the fight against "fake news" came as welcome news to my family. But in ignoring salient details from his biography, the authors are themselves compromised. In exposing the Great Famine, Gareth had to steer a course between two great revolutionary ideas of his day: Bolshevism and Nazism. Whilst highlighting Gareth's famous flight with Hitler and Goebbels in February 1933, they omit to mention that he was on stage that same day at the Nazi Rally addressed by Hitler, and later dined alone with Goebbels. Goebbels wrote in his diary about Gareth: "An intelligent young man. Tells me terrible things about the Soviet Union."

Useful for Germany

Gareth had observed these "terrible things" on his first visit to the USSR in 1930. Being a Russian speaker, he listened and learned. Unlike the Western intellectual fellow travelers who visited the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, Gareth was not "led around by the nose" by Soviet officials and was unimpressed by what he saw of the regime's violent and repressive acts against its own citizens. He knew about the famine and knew it was caused by the deliberate policy of confiscating grain, forcing the peasants to submit to collectivization or die, before he made his final fateful trip to Soviet Ukraine. His purpose was to get an eyewitness account of the tragedy that the foreign correspondents in Moscow were simply not reporting. Did Goebbels, at that dinner, recognize how useful that could be to Germany?

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Gareth had been visiting Germany every year since 1922, when he was 17. He spoke fluent German and had firm friends there, some of whom became Nazis. He was intrigued by Hitler's rise to power and excited to have a ringside seat with Hitler and Goebbels. Nazi Germany very much wanted to publicize the failings of what it termed Judeo-Bolshevism, but for diplomatic reasons didn't want to be seen to be the publicist. Whether he knew it or not, Gareth served its purpose.

Certainly, Gareth got his famine scoop in no small part thanks to an invitation from the German Vice Consul in Kharkov (today known as Kharkiv), the then-capital of Soviet Ukraine. When he boarded the train south from Moscow on March 10, 1933, he was able to assure his Soviet Foreign Ministry minder that he was the guest of the German diplomatic mission and would be under their auspices. This gave him the cover he needed for his unescorted trip south; he merely got off the train several stops short of Kharkov and cramped along the tracks gathering notes and quotes as he went. He then entered Kharkov and resumed his schedule, including a visit to the opera with the German Vice Consul. It is this central detail that is consistently air-brushed out of popular accounts of Gareth's now famous walk through the famine-struck regions of Russia and Ukraine. A notable exception is George Carey and Teresa Cherfas' 2012 British feature documentary, *Hitler, Stalin and Mr. Jones*.

In Agnieszka Holland's film *Mr. Jones*, Gareth is shown languishing in a Soviet jail, having been arrested by Stalin's infamous NKVD. This is simply is not true. On leaving Kharkov, Gareth traveled by luxury train to Moscow with Consul General Karl Walther where the two of them dined with the German Ambassador von Dirksen. Holland's film later shows Gareth breaking the news of his scoop in London. The truth is that he delivered his explosive account of the famine at a press conference in Berlin, giving his scoop to everyone rather than taking it back to a newspaper in London.

Mirror of the Nazi era

Months later, the German Vice Consul's son, Adolf Ehrt, would become head of Goebbels' Anti-Komintern agency, tasked with discrediting the Soviet Union as a "Judeo-Bolshevik" conspiracy. Spreading news stories about the famine was a cornerstone of that policy. Ehrt was also the organizer of *Brüder in Not*, a famine relief campaign for German colonists in the USSR which, despite its innocuous aims, was in fact a covert Nazi organization, for which Gareth unwittingly helped raise money.

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So Gareth's legendary journey to the USSR in 1933 was bookended by visits to Nazi Germany. That doesn't mean he was pro-Nazi. But why conceal the nature of Gareth's German connections? Surely, such nuances make his story an even more interesting reflection of the time. Just six years after Gareth's famine reports, Nazi troops and their Ukrainian collaborators murdered some 1.5 million Ukrainian Jews. In keeping silent about Gareth's connections to prominent Nazis, is it easier to ignore the fact that Nazi propaganda about the "Judeo-Bolshevik" man-made famine played a significant role in that "Holocaust by bullets"?

Gareth spoke of the "follies of nationalism," something he thought "was poisoning our whole system." I wonder what he would think today if he knew the extent to which his own story was being manipulated in the interests of another battlefield. And just as there was no middle ground between Bolshevism and Nazism in the 1930s, political expediency today offers no middle ground.

The obfuscation I have observed in the recent, almost hagiographic, elevation of my great-uncle does justice neither to his memory nor his commitment to journalistic integrity. He has rightly been praised for his part in exposing Stalin's famine, but must truth once again become the first casualty of war?

✦ **Philip Colley** is Gareth Jones's great-nephew and literary executor.

Philip Colley (Great-nephew and literary executor of journalist Gareth Jones)

Translation of an original article published in French on [lemonde.fr](#); the publisher may only be liable for the French version.

In the same section

'Barbie': The younger generations are trying to use beauty culture to their advantage'
For sociologist Chiara Piazzesi, the feminist point of view offered in Greta Gerwig's movie is more individual than collective and does not seek to transform the way women – and women's activities – are perceived and judged.

Edgar Morin: 'France's crisis must be situated in the complexity of multiple global crises and in the context of the decline of democracies'
OP-ED. From the 20th century to the tensions surrounding the death of Nahel M, France is seeing a degradation of the virtues of civilization, amplified by a unilateral way of thinking and the incapability to tap into different fields of knowledge simultaneously, writes the philosopher Edgar Morin.

Angus Deaton: 'Is economic failure an economics failure?'
The 2019 Nobel laureate in economics argues that the field has become 'unmoored from its proper basis, which is the study of human welfare.'

Dishonest behavior by political leaders affects moral decisions in everyday life
Economist Pauline Grosjean reports how a study by the Barcelona Graduate School of Economics shows that the disclosure of political and financial scandals increases thefts in supermarkets.

Electricity market: 'Let's not make mistakes with the reform'
Lawyer Guillaume Dezobry and energy transition expert Pierre-Albert Langlois recommend inciting or even forcing suppliers to diversify their supply methods.

'Pope Francis' diplomacy is in keeping with a neutral and peace-affirming attitude'
Montenegrin philosopher Filip Ivanovic notes in an op-ed that Pope's attitude to the Ukrainian crisis is in line with the Vatican's diplomatic tradition.

'The climate change convictions of CEOs are as variable as stock market prices'
In an op-ed, entrepreneur Jean-François Sebastian criticizes some financial players' skepticism towards green investment, describing it as a 'moral error.'

'Reducing energy sufficiency to individual behaviors would be a grave error'
Efficient energy conservation policies call for structural changes that go beyond the plan announced by Emmanuel Macron, and the individualized efficiency approach of French energy companies, writes Yamina Saheb, an IPCC expert.

'Public space planning is a major lever of action for addressing conflicts between pedestrians and cyclists'
Active mobility expert Camille Gaumont notes that walking and cycling are different in terms of speed and trajectory, making it difficult for them to coexist. She calls for an expansion of urban space allocated to these users.

Macky Sall: 'The inclusion of the African Union in the G20 would benefit the entire world'
In an op-ed, Senegal's president and current chairperson of the AU regrets that South Africa is the continent's only member of an economic forum of international importance.

'As French music festivals garner bigger audiences, they generate bigger environmental impact too'
In an op-ed, consultants and advocates for environmental transition of the culture sector argue that the current model of major music festivals urgently needs to be rethought.

'There is no reason to claim that Turkey is isolated on the international scene'
While Ankara opposes the entry of Sweden and Finland into NATO, its claim that it is isolated blurs perceptions about its foreign policy, writes political scientist Didier Billon.

Overturing Roe v. Wade: 'A triumph of Trumpism and its evangelical supporters'
After Politico published the leaked Supreme Court decision planning to overturn Roe v. Wade, politics expert Denis Lacombe analyzed what the suppression of the right to abortion would mean for the United States.

'What if Wallonia became French in 2024?'
Jules Gheude, a Belgian writer, believes that 2024 could well mark the end of his country, because the planned reform of the Belgian state could reveal that Flemers now prefers independence. Wallonia could then turn to France.

Sylvain Zeghni: 'Russia is capable of considerably destabilizing the Balkans'
By fanning nationalist tensions and unresolved territorial conflicts more than three decades after the breakup of Yugoslavia, Moscow could block any prospect for EU membership by the six candidate countries, writes the economist.

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