

The Establishment
And how they get away with it
Owen Jones

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When Owen Jones appeared as the bright young Oxford 'leftie' columnist in *The Independent* to replace the disgraced Cambridge plagiarist Johann Hari, my hopes were not high. But they were sustained by a markedly more radical and consistent view of the world than those of his predecessor – one of the columnists for conflict at the time of the Iraq War – and lifted by his 2011 book *Chavs*.

Following David Aaronovitch's route to *The Guardian*, Jones does not seem likely to emulate the reactionary trajectory of that ex-CP activist into the arms of Rupert Murdoch and *The Times*. The son of Militant Tendency parents, Jones seems to be holding to and developing his progressive views despite the lure of many media appearances.

His new book is a fine achievement, covering much of UK society touched on by Henry Fairlie in his 1955 use of the phrase 'the Establishment' and the 1959 essay collection of the same title edited by Hugh Thomas. It is apparently selling well and is a refreshing antidote to all those who think Britain is going to the dogs while its young play with their mobiles, the middle aged are weighed down and their elders turn to face the wall.

We have lively interviews – some of the best using pseudonyms – with those from within his Establishment of the City, the media, think-tanks, Westminster, the police, business, the foreign policy establishment and PR. And we also have a lot from their victims, from those losing jobs and benefits to those losing their limbs and liberties. We also hear the little-heard voices of Establishment critics, from economists shunned by the orthodoxies of the past 30 years to those actively campaigning for better ways forward.

In examining the Coalition government claim that

austerity was demanded by excessive public spending he has ex-Bank of England governor Danny Blanchflower saying: 'George Osborne told me himself that all of this was about spin and politics'.

We hear from ex-Afghanistan-serving soldier Joe Glenton: 'The main reason we were there wasn't security here in Britain or security there in Afghanistan. It was because of a perception that we'd failed in US eyes.'

And from Jones himself, a lucid and persuasive writer, we have this on the followers of the right-wing 'outrider' voices, from Sir Keith Joseph and Madsen Pirie onwards, following the MP's expenses scandal:

'The outriders had preached the rolling back of the state, and their sermons were picked up and amplified by politicians. Those people portrayed as dependent on the state became particularly demonized, with MPs playing a key role in focussing public anger on the poorest in society – which proved extremely effective at deflecting scrutiny from those at the top. It's ironic, then, that the individuals most vociferous about rolling back the state were often the most desperate to milk it – even though, in many cases, they were already independently wealthy. As far as expenses were concerned, MPs were distinctly off-message – in this case, their own.'

At 30 Jones seems quite well read, certainly more than this reviewer was at that age. But for those seeking a glass more than three-quarters full, there are deficiencies.

For someone who apparently spent two years on postgraduate study of US history, Jones is weak on tracing links with UK in matters of intelligence and Atlanticism more broadly. He mentions, for example, Anthony Crosland, but not his CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom spell. He mentions the Heritage Foundation, but not its documented involvement in the Thatcher era 'think-tanks'. There's not a word on the British American Project and other well-documented Atlanticist networks. Jones refers to personnel at Policy Exchange, but not its current director, Dean Godson, a former member of the Reagan administration, whose brother

and father have also been key figures in US-UK relations.

He also steers clear of the pro-Israel lobby which, to this reviewer, is an important addition to the Establishment of the 1950s described by Fairlie, Thomas *et al*. To write of Neil (now Lord) Kinnock and Labour without mentioning Robert Maxwell and of New Labour without reference to Michael (now Lord) Levy and Jon (now Lord) Mendelsohn is a serious omission.

Some readers may find Jones a bit thin in places they know in depth. But wasn't it ever thus, especially with young writers working on a broad canvas?

There will be time to deepen and extend this fine and timely book. *The Establishment* is good stuff – the angry and intelligent voice of a new generation of Britons.

Tom Easton