

OPINION

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.'

By Philip Colley (Great-nephew and literary executor of journalist Gareth Jones)
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Gareth Jones, August 24, 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?

Read more [The Ukrainian famine was a 'Soviet genocide' different from the Holocaust and other mass atrocities'](#)

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 tramped 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 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 Ehrh, 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. Ehrh 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

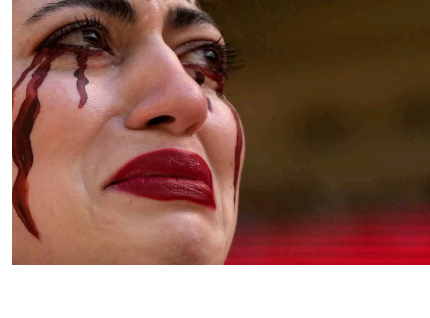
Le Monde's cartoon of the day

CARTE BLANCHE. This cartoon by Sanaga, a French member of Cartooning for Peace, appeared on the front page of *Le Monde* on June 19.



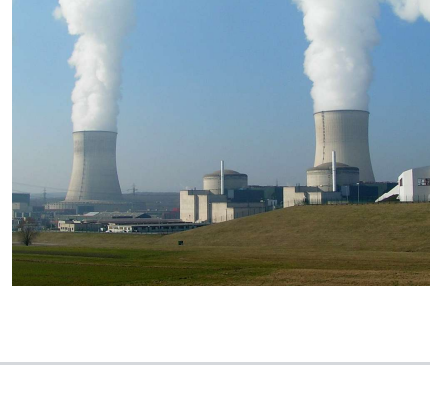
Le Monde's January 16 cartoon

COLUMN. This cartoon by Osama Hajjaj, a Jordanian member of Cartooning for Peace, appeared on the front page of *Le Monde* on January 26.



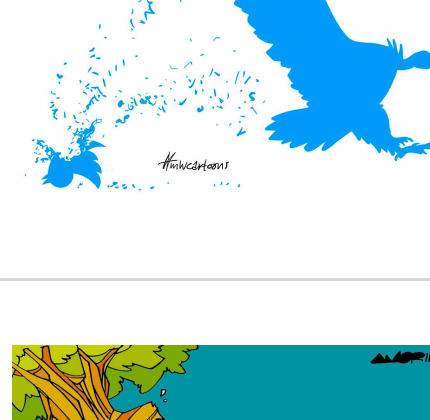
Iranian women's demands belong to the ideological enemy: the West'

COLUMN. The protests that have shaken Iran since the death of Mahsa Amini, on September 16, illustrate a rupture between those born in the 2000s and the country's theocratic elites.



'Nuclear power is one of the most expensive energies, and it makes France dependent on Russia'

Cost, environment, nuclear risk: Corinne Lepage, France's former environment minister, says there are several 'false truths' about nuclear power in France that should be cleared up.



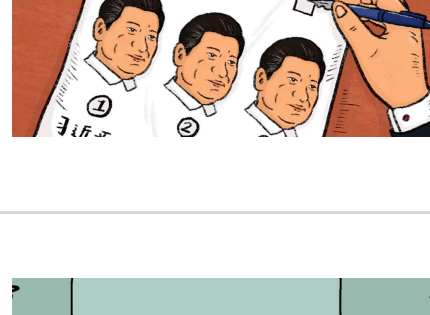
Le Monde's November 9 cartoon

COLUMN. This cartoon by Maarten Wolterink, a Belgian member of Cartooning for Peace, appeared on the front page of *Le Monde* on November 9.



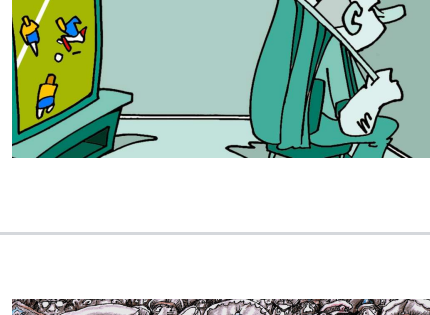
Le Monde's October 25 cartoon

COLUMN. This cartoon by Amorim, a Brazilian member of Cartooning for Peace, appeared on the front page of *Le Monde* on October 25.



Le Monde's October 17 cartoon

COLUMN. This cartoon by Stellina, a Taiwanese member of Cartooning for Peace, appeared on the front page of *Le Monde* on October 17.



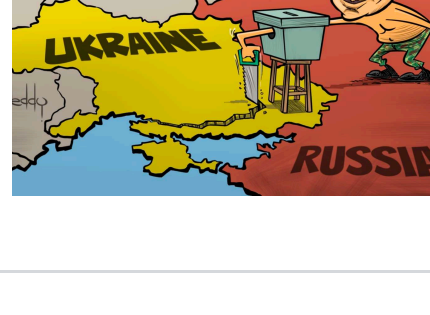
Le Monde's October 12 cartoon

This cartoon by Amorim, a Brazilian member of Cartooning for Peace, appeared on the front page of *Le Monde* on October 12.



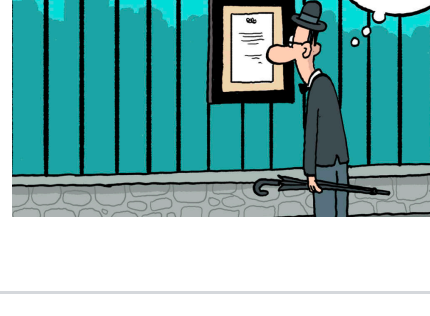
Le Monde's October 10 cartoon

COLUMN. This cartoon by Meddy, a Ukrainian member of Cartooning for Peace, appeared on the front page of *Le Monde* on October 10.



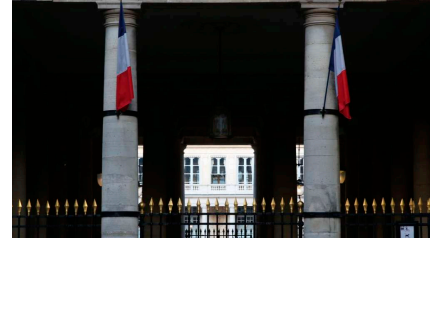
Le Monde's October 3 cartoon

COLUMN. This cartoon by Meddy, a member of Cartooning for Peace, appeared on the front page of *Le Monde* on October 3.



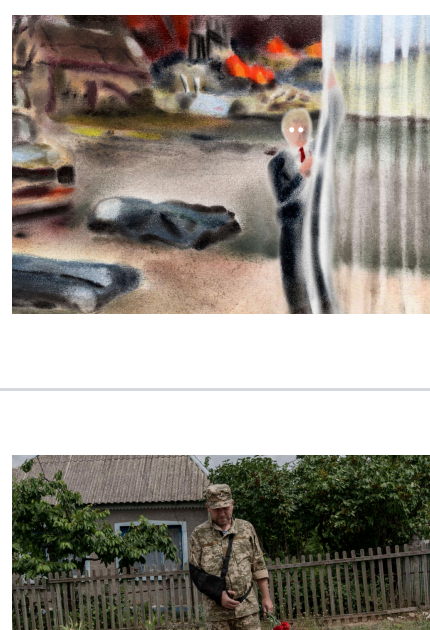
Le Monde's September 12 cartoon

This cartoon by Lectrr, a member of Cartooning for Peace, appeared on the front page of *Le Monde* on September 12.



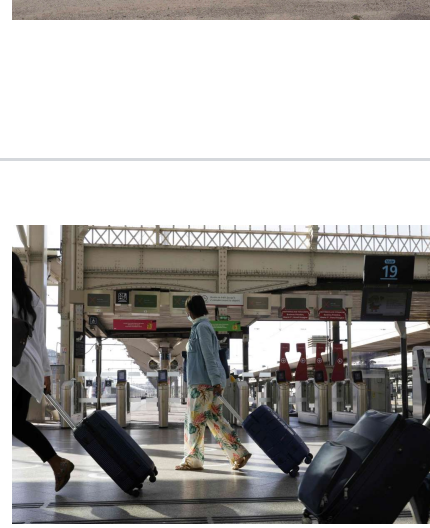
'Every new threat to fundamental freedoms cannot result in a constitutional amendment'

Safeguarding ratchet jurisprudence would avoid periodically amending the French Constitution to guarantee new rights and freedoms, explains essayist and honorary general economic and financial controller Alain Simon.



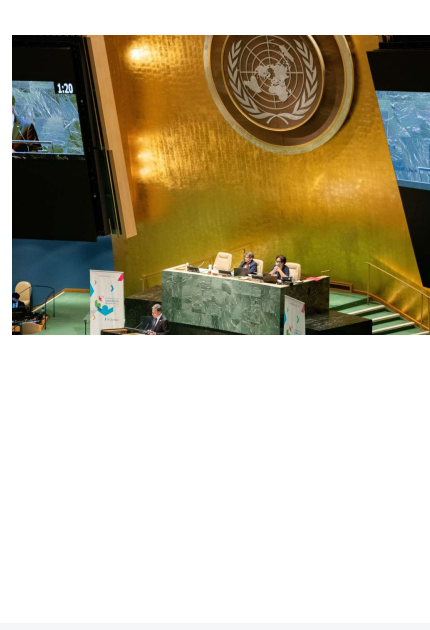
Truth, the shaken pillar of democracy

Politicians have long been accused of concealing the truth or failing to accept it. But such suspicion has never been so widespread. The relationship between politics and truth has always been questioned by philosophy. Let's look back at this long history, in this era of 'post-truth.'



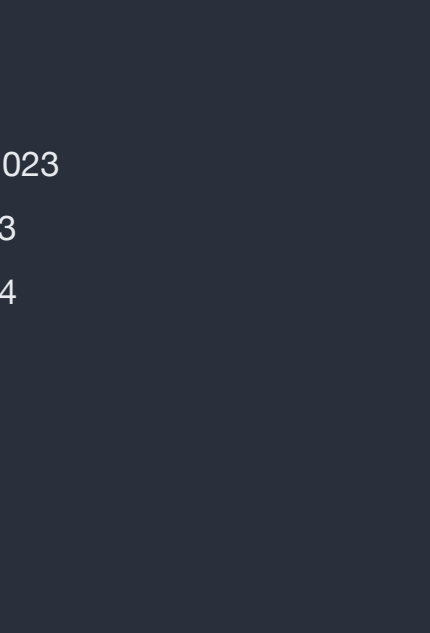
War in Ukraine: 'Those who persist in ignoring moral issues should not be called realists, but simply cynics'

To call both Russia and Ukraine 'rational actors defending their interests' would be 'false realism,' says international relations expert Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer



'The French obsession with railways forgets that the objective is not to run trains, but to move people'

The ecological benefits of train travel must be more closely examined, argues transport expert Jean Coldefy, and the first step in the climate transition should be on the road.



UN's failure over war in Ukraine: 'The time has come to imagine a new world organization that will ensure peace'

According to legal expert Monique Chemillier-Gendreau, the risks posed to world security by the war in Ukraine require a total reinvention of the United Nations' mission.

