

Journalism that cared

For Paul Foot, who died on 18 July, principle was not negotiable, nor was it clubbable, regardless of his wide circle of friends; and those who, since his death, have suggested that Paul was a brilliant journalist in spite of his socialism, show his memory little respect.

In their references to his “Bollinger Bolshevism” and his “socialist hair shirt”, the liberal bombers and assorted Blairites who prefer this “in spite of” version have exploited Paul’s ironic, often black, jokes about his high-born background. In truth, Paul was the supreme journalist he was largely because of his socialism. His work exemplified the natural partnership between a world-view that saw the betterment of humanity and the fight against injustice as paramount, and a journalism that respected and cared for its readers, especially those with no one to speak for them.

There are so few like Paul Foot, alas, because so many are conditioned to believe that they can be ordained true journalists only if they deny this truth. Paul’s greatest investigative campaigns were built on this premise; Mordechai Vanunu, a hero of Paul’s and whose freedom he campaigned for, acknowledged this the other day.

As Clare, Paul’s partner, says, his socialism engaged “every time he stepped outside the front door”, and the corruption of the powerful and the struggles of ordinary people he confronted were the roots of both his political life and his journalism.

He was also, speaking personally, the finest of friends: above all, an unerring ally. I am writing this overseas; the day before I left, that marvellous voice of his was on my answering machine with familiar words: “John, have you seen what the bastards are doing now... ?”

Thinking about the loss of Paul as I read of the Blairites celebrating the political survival of a war criminal, along with the “return” of the disgraced Mandelson,

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brings to mind those great lines from King Lear as he grieves over Cordelia:

“No, no, no life?/Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,/And thou no breath at all?” **JP**

Paul Foot former editor of Socialist Worker and columnist for the London Daily Mirror and Private Eye, was voted Britain’s Campaigning Journalist of the Decade in 2000.