

Apply The Political Rules of the Game

by Michael Curtis



In his brilliant film, *La Règle du Jeu*, often considered one of the greatest film ever made, the director Jean Renoir, tackling a serio-comedy of manners in a French upper class setting of the late 1930s, discusses the rules of the game,

the mores that specify proper behavior, though they may be applied differently. Each clique in the world has its own customs, mores, and language. Breach of those rules is seen as a moral transgression as well as outrageous cheating.

When should rules be enforced and who should be punished? Realistically, political and official organizations like human beings lie and cheat, tell white lies, utter what Winston Churchill once called "terminologically inexactitudes," in conduct that contradicts generally accepted ethical codes but is not a cause for alarm or condemnation. This was not, however, the case with the breach of the rules of the game by the Australian cricket team playing in Cape Town in the third test match with South Africa. Australia was losing and in an act of desperation deliberately tampered with the ball to get advantage in the game. Three members of the team conspired to alter the ball by using sandpaper to change its trajectory to make the ball swing more than normal, making it more difficult to hit.

Cricketers are supposed to be role models, and not cheaters. On March 25, 2018 the three players of the test team, Steve Smith the captain, David Warner, deputy captain, and Cameron Bancroft a batsman were sent home in disgrace as a result of behaving "not in the laws of the game," euphemism for cheating. Two were banned from playing for a year and the third for 9 months by the official group Cricket Australia. It was a bitter experience for Smith, the "golden boy of cricket," whose test batting average of 947, the second best ever after the immortal Don Bradman with 961, earns him the title of the top ranked cricket test player in the world.

Cheating of this kind is not unknown. A particularly infamous incident in the U.S. was the scandal concerning the "golden boy" of football, quarterback Tom Brady who was accused of conspiring to deflate footballs used in the AFC Championship game in January 2015, and who was suspended for four games in 2016 for violating NFL policy on integrity of the game. The

Australian case was more meaningful since cricket is the national sport, important in the image of Australian national identity. It is said that the position of cricket captain is second in importance only to that of the prime minister.

The rules of the game are important for sport, why not for politics? The Australian captain confessed his responsibility for cheating and apologized. The difference in political behavior is the unwillingness to admit breakage of the rules, or indeed even refusal to admit that they exist. Many cases can illustrate this but a few examples can suffice.

First is Russia, now accused by more than a dozen countries for being responsible for use of a military grade nerve agent in an attempt to murder a former Russian double agent and his daughter in Salisbury on March 4, 2018. The poison is now understood to have been applied to the front door of their house. Russian authorities, masters of moral gymnastics, persist in denying any responsibility, protest against the decisions to expel Russian diplomats, and threaten to retaliate against the actions of more than 20 countries and organizations in expelling more than 150 Russian diplomats and intelligence officers.

Russian assertions are shameless. On one hand, they say that Russia does not have any information on the lives of Russian citizens on the territory of Britain, on the other hand they know the British intelligence special services played a role in the poisoning. They hold that the British authorities have adopted a prejudicial, biased, and hypocritical stance. They argue those authorities have acted at the expense of common sense, rules of civilized interstate dialogue, and principles of international law.

Russia denies the use of nerve gases, including Novichok, more deadly than VX, that target part of the body's nervous system, though the agent is made in the Russian lab Yasenevo, run by SVR .

Britain was slow to deal with the 14 suspicious deaths in the last decade of various Russians living in the country. Now the UK has begun to implement the rules of the game. It is beginning a counter offensive against fake news by Russia as well as terrorists on social media to combat propaganda, misinformation, and extremist material. Prime Minister Theresa May is aware that there are 2,800 bots, computer programs that generate posts on social media, and at the least can cause disarray and confusion. Every part of the government and every agency will participate in examining these.

The UK is also examining, as are US authorities, the extent of money laundering by anonymous owners in the country. According to the US Treasury, some \$300 billion is laundered in the US every year. Estimates for UK suggest it is \$125 billion. In both cases, it is probable that the largest share is held by Russians, including property transactions of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Unexpectedly, we have just learned that the rules of the game apply in the Far East. The meeting on March 26-27 in Beijing of Chinese President Xi Jinping and North Korean President Kim Jong Un may have been harmonious and intimate, but the Chinese leader reminded his guest of the rules. The elder generations of leaders of the two countries maintained cordial relations, trusted, and supported each other, and "wrote a fine story" in the history of public relations. But Kim had broken the rules since he came to power in 2011. He had purged officials close to Beijing; one of them was his uncle Kim Jong-nam whom he had murdered by having him smeared with VX in Malaysia. The North Korean also had conducted weapons tests on Chinese holidays and events.

In Asia educational rules are disregarded with frequent cheating at exams in India as examiners are not interested in honest behavior or are being paid off. Question papers are leaked, examiners dictate the answers while 10 million students take the tests for the 600,000 public funded

university seats. Democratic India has misplaced the rules of the game.

In the Middle East the Palestinians also have been unwilling to recognize rules of the game. Two instances need be mentioned. One is that the U.S. Taylor Force Act suspends aid to the Palestinian Authority as long as it pays stipends both to the families of terrorists killed while attacking Israelis, and to captured terrorists. Yet the PA still pays directly to the families, providing \$343 million, 7% of the PA annual budget. A second issue concerns Hamas which is organizing a March of 100,000 Gazans to storm the Israeli security fence around Gaza. This is supposed to signify the return of Gaza "refugees" to their homes though in effect it may be the heralding of a third Intifada. Left unsaid is the non existence of more than a few "refugees". A refugee born on the same day of the creation of Israel on May 14, 1948 would be almost 70.

A third persisting issue in which the rules of the game are absent is the flagrant antisemitism in the British Labour Party, and the inability or unwillingness of the leader Jeremy Corbyn to deal with it, to condemn forthrightly manifestations of this disease, and to expel from the party those responsible for it. Since he became leader in 2015 more than 300 cases of antisemitism by Labour Party members have been referred to Corbyn. In recent weeks a number of breakage of rules have appeared. An MP named David Lammy, one of the few black Labour MPs, was attacked by leftists in the party who want to deselect him from Parliament because he expressed solidarity with the Jewish population in his constituency. He had attended a rally with the theme "Enough is Enough."

It gets worse. A few Labour websites have proclaimed that it was the Jews, in the form of the Israeli Mossad, who were responsible for the Salisbury poisoning.

A former mayor, the Pakistani born Salim Mulla, of Blackburn

declared that Israel was behind the recent school shooting in the U.S and behind ISIS. Worst of all, a more prominent person, Christine Shawcroft, member of the Labour executive committee, head of the "disputes panel" and director of the Trotskyist group Momentum defended two despicable characters: one was a former LP candidate who had posted on Facebook article denying the Holocaust. The candidate Alan Bull, had been suspended for posting the article that was entitled, "The International Red Cross confirms the Holocaust of 6 millions Jews is a hoax." The other person is a former mayor of the London borough of Tower Hamlets, a Bangladeshi born British politician Lutfur Rahman, who was dismissed from his office for election fraud.

Perhaps we need a new formula, a film, a documentary, even a musical, to explain the meaning and significance of the rules of the political game. Our leaders must stress the importance of the principles that uphold moral conduct, and punish without qualification the transgressors who break the rules.