

Ouch! Be Careful! You Never Know.

By Reg Green

In my first years at the Daily Telegraph in London I was taking an undergraduate course in history at Birkbeck College, the evening college of London University. Many students were there from all over the fast-fading British Empire. One evening standing in line in the cheerless refectory for a hurried meal before class I picked one of the standard dishes: spaghetti, white beans and cauliflower.



"It's their version of keeping Britain white," I said to an African student standing next to me. "Be careful," he said. "I'm taking a law degree and might be Minister of Justice if you come to write an article about us." We laughed.— you could in those days —

but, sure enough, some of those students standing in line with their plastic trays and pitiful dinners did become leaders of their newly-independent homelands where a bachelor's degree from London was a precious qualification.

Those nights flashed before my eyes when i read a Christopher Hitchens essay last week about England as a safe haven in the post-war years for even the topmost people in societies undergoing upheaval. As he tells it Hitchens didn't catch the name of a man he was introduced to at a party. "Paul from Roumania, did you say?" he asked politely as they shook hands. He felt a slight stiffening of the other's grip. "Paul *of* Roumania," his new acquaintance corrected him.

I suppose that's how Bashar Assad feels right now.