

The Sarawak Report – a review by Kevin d’Arcy, former AEJ UK executive secretary and editor of Spokesman

Reporting on Europe can obviously limit the time available to monitor reporting on the rest of the world. Which is possibly why I (and others) had not fully registered the world’s biggest financial heist with the theft of many billions of dollars from Malaysia’s sovereign wealth fund. Former Prime Minister Najib Razak, who lost power in an election last May (2018), faces a series of charges related to the scandal. However, some of the political smokescreen was aided by British entities, while significant amounts of the money siphoned from 1Malaysia Development Board known as 1MDB went through British-based banks.

And most importantly, the conspiracy was not just reported by one very determined British journalist, but also uncovered by her, almost single-handedly, despite a remarkable antipathy for much of the time by British media.

The full story, which I have just finished reading, was published last year (2018): The Sarawak Report, by Clare Rewcastle Brown.

Here, now, in Europe we concentrate mainly on protecting information; in most other countries the problem is simply getting it. Surely it is very much in our interest to encourage access to information everywhere? At least as important as providing arms. An important way in which we can help is by following the example of Clare Brown and use our external platforms to publish facts that are routinely banned in developing countries. With the added help of on-line media, these reports will eventually get through.

In Malaysia this help was to finally come from the Wall Street Journal, then the Sunday Times and the Guardian. The walls were beginning to fall.

The BBC had previously chosen instead to air television programmes provided by a company paid by the Malaysian government.

Eventually western governments jumped in, despite their interests in selling arms to Malaysia, especially the USA and the Swiss, mainly because of their banks’ involvement - and the story grew useful legs.

The former prime minister lost his election in May 2018 and awaited trial on multiple charges.