

# The Danger of Getting Sidetracked

What this story really shows is how the corporate media derails meaningful debates and draws us all into a modern version of bread and circuses, writes Jonathan Cook.

By **Jonathan Cook**

[Jonathan-Cook.net](http://Jonathan-Cook.net)



**I** really do not wish to write about Mark Field, the British government minister who assaulted a climate change activist last week, grabbing her by the neck and violently marching her out of a City of London dinner while all the hundreds of other wealthy diners watched either impassively or approvingly. But whatever my wishes, it seems I must.

I don't wish to write about Mark Field, because the media have constructed a debate that is limited to one matter only, even if there are apparently innumerable variations of that one issue to be raised.

Did Field behave like a gentleman or a knave? Is it reasonable that he believed the woman posed a danger? Is his apology enough? Were the climate change activists trespassing and, if they were, did that justify Field's actions? Has he broken the ministerial code of conduct? Would we still be outraged if the activist were a man? Should he resign? Is his outburst evidence he is a wife beater? And so on.

When we engage in these debates, they seem important. As if we are fighting for the health of our societies; or upholding key values, or at the very least the rule of law.

As if it shows we care. As if it can make things a little better.


Media Lens Retweeted



**Louise Haigh MP** ✓  
@LouHaigh



When someone's defence for assaulting a woman is that it was 'instinctive', the Ministerial Code is fairly low on my list of concerns...

 **Krishnan Guru-Murthy** ✓ @krishgm · 16h

Mark Field says his behaviour towards the woman was "instinctive". He regrets it. His concern is whether the ministerial code has been breached.  
[twitter.com/paulbranditv/s...](https://twitter.com/paulbranditv/s...)

8:35 AM · Jun 21, 2019 · [Twitter for Android](#)

Which is exactly why I don't want to write about Mark Field.

Because the reality is that things won't get better while we allow ourselves to be manipulated into these kind of ring-fenced debates.

There is a reason why the corporate media quickly escalate simple stories like Mark Field's into such apparently elaborate and polarizing public discussions. And the reason is to stop other kinds of debates, much more vital ones, from taking place that these stories would naturally provoke if we had a truly free media. We are being offered the modern version of bread and circuses.

Strip away the narrow, sectarian party politics in play here, and there is nothing debatable about Mark Field's actions. He is caught on camera – his face full of rage, not fear – violently grabbing an activist who clearly poses no threat to him and who is, in fact, simply walking behind his chair. Field pushes her up against a wall, then seizes her by the back of the neck and frog-marches her out of the dining hall. If you feel it necessary, you can also factor in that the activist is a woman and the government minister a man.

### **Simple Situation**

Either way, what is shown in the video is an entirely unjustified attack on a peaceful protester. Had the roles been reversed, the activist (whether a man or woman) would have been immediately arrested for assaulting a government minister. The activist would now be in jail with lawyers arguing over whether bail should be allowed. So why isn't Mark Field now in the same predicament?

The point is that anyone who wishes to make the argument any more complex than the one I just outlined is doing so either in bad faith or because they have listened too credulously to others who have spoken in bad faith. Which includes the entire spectrum of the state-corporate media, including its supposedly liberal components like the BBC and the *Guardian*.



Johnny Mercer MP   
@JohnnyMercerUK



Honestly? Try being in our shoes in the current environment.

He panicked, he's not trained in restraint and arrest, and if you think this is 'serious violence', you may need to recalibrate your sensitivities. Calm down, move on, and be thankful this wasn't worse.

What the story about Mark Field really illustrates is how effective the corporate media is in derailing meaningful debates about the state of our societies. The media offer us

a placebo – a public arena for largely empty arguments that we are encouraged to become deeply invested in emotionally. We are offered two easy options and must choose to rally to the cause of one of those tribes – left or right. And through righteous anger, for or against, we feel temporarily cured of a deeper dissatisfaction or sense of foreboding.

The reality is that these public debates are simply gladiatorial contests offering instant – and hollow – gratification. They have as much concrete meaning in terms of changing the substance of our societies, of addressing the injustice and unsustainability of our political and economic systems, as does cheering a football team.

That is not to argue that denouncing an assault on a peaceful protester is wasted energy, or that rationalizing it – as so many people on the right are currently doing – is not deeply ugly. The treatment of protesters by the state and its agents, or of women by men, are important matters for public discussion. But that is *not* why the media are so willingly fueling the row about Mark Field's actions.

### **Deflecting Attention**

The debate is not being used as an opportunity to clarify how our society should view acceptable behavior; it is being actively promoted by a ruling class to deflect our attention from the deeper contextual issues the Mark Field episode highlights.



Darren Grimes   
@darrengimes\_



I think the reality we need to face up to is that these climate change protestors won't be pleased until we're all crawling around in our own filth and only the rich can go on holiday, drive a car or eat meat. Can we stop pandering to them, please?

10:17 AM · Jun 21, 2019 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

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Allowing two sides in a debate about whether he behaved appropriately is already to have conceded the progressive argument. It is to accept that there is room for discussion, that the video evidence is not conclusive in itself.

This is a contest where the stakes are so immaterial to the corporate media that each outlet can afford to take either side of the debate and know it will make no meaningful difference. They can berate Mark Field or sympathize with him, and it will make no odds to anyone or anything but Field and possibly the victim of his assault.

And the very cynical fueling of this debate by the state-corporate media, one that may last days or even weeks, can then be cited as seemingly persuasive evidence that the media truly is a pluralistic forum for public discussion, where all sides are represented, where everyone is given a voice. Contrived debates like this one will be used as ammunition to shunt media critics like myself further into sidings, showing how vigorous, relevant and on the side of the underdog the “mainstream” media really is.

This is the primary purpose of the state-corporate media. To draw our energies away from real issues hiding in plain sight towards obvious ones of only specific or marginal significance, and then persuade us that we are in fact engaged with the most vital issues of the day.

### **Personalities, Not Power Structures**

This is precisely why the media are obsessed with individuals and personalities – celebs, sporting heroes, royal family members, actors, politicians, world leaders – not the actual power structures that dictate the patterns of our lives, that determine the chances of us gaining redress or justice, that offer the key to extricating ourselves from the economic and environmental ruin we are hurtling towards.



Jeremy Vine   
@theJeremyVine



Day one of Tory leadership contest:

1. Police called to Boris Johnson flat after neighbours hear screaming and crashing
2. Jeremy Hunt has to suspend one of his Foreign Office ministers for throwing a woman against a wall

This could be a lively month  
[#conservativeleadership](#)

If necessary, Mark Field can be sacrificed by the power structures that dominate our lives (though usually only temporarily – think of other government ministers who have found themselves briefly ousted from power and then quickly rehabilitated, such as Boris Johnson or Liam Fox) because



the mechanisms that protect these power structures are far more important than the punishment or humiliation or any lone individual.

Consider two much deeper issues desperately struggling to gain any traction as they are smothered by the media's gleeful furor over the Mark Field story.

One concerns the event Mark Field attended. It was an annual dinner at Mansion House, the official residence of the mayor of the City of London. The City of London is not the Mary Poppins' way of saying "London." It is a tiny, secretive enclave within Britain, a state within a state located in the heart of London. Seen another way, it is a kind of British Vatican, though one that worships money alone.

### **Corrupt Fiefdom**

It abides by its own rules, financial and criminal, creating effectively a tax-haven within the UK that cannot be policed by any of the usual watchdogs. The City of London has managed to continue unreformed from its medieval origins into the modern era for one reason alone: it is the perfect way for a wealthy elite to maintain their power and privilege by bypassing the imperfect democratic system operating outside its concrete shores, in the rest of the U.K. The City of London is a deeply corrupt fiefdom inside a slightly less corrupt Britain. If the mafia were given the chance to make themselves look legit, they might create in Italy something very much like the City of London.

Those attending the dinner are drawn from either Britain's wealth elite, or those who serve them and aspire to join them. Figures such as Field, a minister in the Foreign

Office, and Philip Hammond, the chancellor, who addressed the dinner, oil some of the wheels of this exclusive club partially out in the open, through U.K. politics. But they oil other wheels in the shadows, through their activities in the City of London. What precisely they get up to in the City is difficult to know given the secrecy, and all the harder to now learn about after Field's ruling party has worked so assiduously to hobble Julian Assange and the *WikiLeaks* platform that was established to help whistleblowers expose the more shadowy activities of our rulers.



talkRADIO   
@talkRADIO



Sir Michael Fallon responds after Mark Field MP manhandled a protester out of a dinner: "It was an appalling breach of security ... we should work out how these people actually got in and why there were not enough security to get them out."

The City of London is the biggest weapon in the armory of the ruling elite's class war against the British – and global – public. It is a vacuum sucking up public finances

to further enrich the wealthy and leave the masses reeling from austerity policies, while using the media to bolster the impression that it is a hub of wealth creation.

That's why you almost never hear anything about the City of London. Our supposed representatives, politicians and corporate media alike, are happy to keep the veil mostly drawn across this pocket of power. It is not just that they do not want to take it on, they are already very much part of the power structures it has designed both to preserve itself and shield itself from meaningful criticism.

As long as we are talking about Mark Field's attitude to women, we are not talking about his and his government's active collusion with the most regressive, secretive, unaccountable rotten borough in the UK – a city-state located geographically inside Britain, but operating outside its strictures.

Mark Field's attack could have provided an opportunity to examine this powerful relic of medieval Britain, to consider who the City of London really serves, and to wonder why the political class are cozying up to it rather than trying to eradicate it as a dangerous behemoth of Britain's surviving feudal order. The City of London is integral to a system of ever-accelerating wealth hoarding by a global elite that is economically unsustainable. But in response, the media willingly amplify a loud culture war and simplistic identity politics precisely so no other kind of debate stands a chance of being audible.



Julia Hartley-Brewer   
@JuliaHB1



Morning all. This happened last night. I have a funny feeling that, in a few years' time, this is how *\*most\** of us are going to feel towards climate protesters...

The other, even more obvious issue the activists were trying to draw attention to was the threat posed to the environment, to other species and to our own future by the preposterous, self-serving premise – espoused by the City of London and its politician and media cronies – of endless economic growth based on the exploitation of the planet's finite resources.

### **Late Waking to Emergency**

We are now facing a climate emergency – or rather some of us are finally and very belatedly waking up to a climate emergency that has been many decades in the making. We have come to it so late because the wealth elite represented at the City of London dinner have used the key power structures at their disposal – the political and media establishments –

to deceive us, to keep us sleepwalking towards oblivion as they have carried on plundering the planet, destroying the biosphere, and stashing away their inordinate wealth.

The state-corporate media has not only downplayed climate change but is still doing so, as credibly as it can manage given the relentless scientific evidence that human society is hurtling towards an abyss.

In fact, many of the journalists responding to Mark Field's attack have lost no time in using it as a way to further alienate the public from climate change activism. They have presented those prepared not simply to wait quietly for us all to be driven over the cliff-edge as a nasty, uncouth, potentially violent rabble. They have done this even as the video footage shows the women who protested at the Mansion House dinner were dressed in evening gowns and remained entirely peaceful as they sought to gain attention for the most urgent and catastrophic issue of our time.

There should be no debate that they are right, that we live in a rotten and rotting system of power that has blindly invested all its energies in perpetuating a feudal system of wealth creation for a ruling class, even as the futures of our children – all our children – hang in the balance.

Yes, Mark Field, his face red with indignation, looked like a man who had lost the plot, who was filled with an overwhelming sense of his own entitlement, and who was deeply threatened – not by violence from the protesters but by arguments he simply has no way of addressing rationally.

The real debate we need urgently to engage with is not whether Mark Field is a wife-beater or misogynist. It is how

we deal with the power structure he represents, the system he is a loyal servant of. For that psychopathic system is ready to beat us all, men and women alike, into the dust, to keep extracting the last ounce of wealth from a dying corpse, to obliterate our futures.

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*This article is from his blog, [Jonathan Cook.net](http://JonathanCook.net).*

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