

[Empire book cancelled after petition](#)

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Body

An Oxford-educated professor has been "cancelled" for the second time in three years as his publisher withdrew his biography of a British imperialist after a petition started by a communist philosopher.

Bruce Gilley's book *The Last Imperialist: Sir Alan Burns' Epic Defense of the British Empire* was due to be the first volume in a planned "Problems of Anti-Colonialism" series. That has now been scrapped after allegations that the avowed "pro-colonial" Professor **Gilley** endorsed "a white nationalist perspective".

A petition by Joshua Moufawad-Paul, a Maoist philosopher, urging the withdrawal of the series by the publisher Rowman & Littlefield for allegedly lending "academic credibility" to "settler-colonial propaganda", has gained almost 1,000 signatures on the petitions website www.change.org. Professor Moufawad-Paul, of York University in Canada, claimed that Professor **Gilley** had shown "a pigheaded refusal to deal with the rigorous historical analyses" that debunked his view of European colonialism as beneficial.

According to Professor **Gilley**, who teaches political science at Portland State University, the "snowballing" of the petition on social media led to the cancellation of the series without explanation. He said it highlighted a grave threat to free speech. Professor **Gilley**, a self-declared "scourge of the academic left", achieved notoriety in 2017 when his paper *The Case for Colonialism* argued that colonial rule was beneficial and legitimate. Independence had led to a "cesspool of human suffering" and western rule should be re-introduced in developing countries, it suggested.

While some academics criticised the paper's scholarship and said it ignored a vast body of research, the publisher insisted that the peer-review process had been properly completed. The paper, in *Third World Quarterly*, was retracted amid a wider furore due to "threats of personal violence" against the journal's editor.

Writing about the backlash to his latest work in *The Wall Street Journal*, Professor **Gilley** said: "The Last Imperialist is the culmination of five years of intensive primary source research into the life of Burns, who was governor of the Gold Coast [now Ghana] and a prominent critic of rapid decolonisation while serving at the United Nations after World War Two. The book passed peer review with Lexington Books [an imprint of Rowman & Littlefield] last December, and it carried endorsements from two giants in the field of colonial history, Jeremy Black and Tirthankar Roy. The book was already being sold to distributors and stores." He said that within two days of the petition's launch, all mention of his book had been "airbrushed" from the publisher's website without any word to him. The publisher then cancelled the series, he added.

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Professor **Gilley** said he attributed the "ease and suddenness" of his latest "cancellation" to "this year's Black Lives Matter moral panic", which he claimed had "taken cultural totalitarianism to new levels". He added that the "Problems of Anti-Colonialism" series, of which he was an editor, had also gone through peer review and was "planned as a forum for critical responses to the anti-colonial and 'decolonising' intellectual projects that have become pervasive in global politics (and maybe in your workplace)".

He said that he and his co-editor had received an eager response from young scholars in Africa and South Asia, where, he claimed, "the elder generation's anti-colonialism has long since worn thin".

Professor **Gilley** added that the justification for the series was that today's anti-colonial, postcolonial and "decolonising" narratives have become assaults on the foundations of the Enlightenment. "The mob's takedown of the series shows its importance. The stage actors have appeared right on cue in this dramatisation of what 'decolonising' means for free speech. Whatever the fate of our book series, freedom is needed more urgently than ever."

Tirthankar Roy, professor of economic history at the London School of Economics, said in a letter to Lexington Books: "I take only one kind of historical scholarship seriously, one based on evidence and explaining a process of change - the manuscript passed that test, not only for me, but also the referees.

That it could be an apology for empires, whatever that idiotic expression means, never crossed my mind, I do not think this book was one."

Mr Roy said their decision meant that a group of "phoney academics" based in privileged western universities "should decide what is published on Asian and African history" and this represented "real colonialism".

Graphic

Sir Alan Burns, governor of several colonies, was the subject of a biography by **Bruce Gilley**, right. It was withdrawn after a communist professor organised a www.change.org petition

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