

## Parish Notices

**Robin Ramsay**

Occasionally I get asked to give a short description of *Lobster*. That used to be reasonably simple: it is little magazine which is centrally interested in the role of the covert world on our history. What should I now say? It used to be that but is now a website whose editor has recently been centrally interested in the current economic crisis? Put that way it sounds as though there has been some big shift; and in a sense there has been. I am no longer collecting every scrap of information about the British intelligence and security services in the way that I did once. Why not? A number of things have come together.

Firstly, it no longer seems as important. Other people are doing this, which they weren't in the mid 1980s. (I just googled 'MI5' and got 2.8 million hits.) Secondly, when *Lobster* began in 1983 I had just joined the Labour Party, and the events of the 1960s and 70s, which led to the disaster of Thatcher, were still fresh in the collective party memory. The pursuit of the covert state operations against Labour governments, the Labour Party and wider left seemed politically relevant. My interest in MI5 was in MI5 *qua* enemy of the left. But as the wider left disintegrated in the UK after the fall of the Soviet bloc, and the British secret state more or less gave up surveilling, penetrating and manipulating it, the political point of trying to find out what the spooks were doing diminished. In 1986 when *Lobster* 11 appeared, detailing some of the anti-Labour activities of the 1970s, many of the people involved were still alive, as were the consequences of those operations. Now such research is just history. It's still interesting but not as interesting.

Secondly, the shift to economic politics isn't in fact something new for me; but in the past I didn't think it apposite

to put much of it in *Lobster*. I was always interested in our economic history. 'What to do about the City?' was on the agenda of the British left in the early 1980s – before 'Big Bang' in 1986 sold the City off to the Americans and London became merely a less regulated outpost of Wall Street. I still have the 1982 Labour Party publication *The City: a socialist approach* and Richard Minns' *Take Over the City* (Pluto) from the same year. The City-versus-industry debate was alive in the Labour Party until 1987/8, when Neil Kinnock and those around him decided to surrender to the City, for reasons that are still not entirely clear to me but are probably simple careerism.

I wrote about this economic and political history in *Prawn Cocktail Party* (1998) and again in *The Rise of New Labour* (2002), to no effect.<sup>1</sup> But here we are, North Sea oil is fading away, manufacturing has had 30 years of neglect and contempt, and the City-versus-industry perspective on the British economy is now back on the agenda having been buried under North Sea oil revenues and the delusions signified by the phrase 'the knowledge economy'. Thus what had been on my back burner has moved to the front.

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<sup>1</sup> *Prawn Cocktail Party* was irretrievably mangled by the publisher and consequently blanked by me and *The Rise of New Labour* sold only a few hundred copies.