

## **Lobster 60**

### **Tittle-tattle**

**Tom Easton**

**R**eaders of *Lobster* may well encounter the rough 'conspiracy theorists' abuse routinely dished out to anyone questioning an orthodox explanation of events. And, indeed, we do well not to seek over-simple, monochrome accounts of complex occurrences. This is a messy world where the level of institutional core competence, especially in the UK, is low, so one in which we know cock-ups do indeed happen. So, occasionally, do non-causally linked coincidences.

And yet, and yet..... Ponder this week-long sequence of events starting in late October.

One, British Airways chairman Martin Broughton complains about the UK 'kowtowing' to the United States on airport security.<sup>1</sup>

Two, MI6 chief Sir John Sawers gives a lecture saying why his service should be excluded from general government cuts.<sup>2</sup>

Three, we have an international terror scare, with airborne parcels apparently directed at President Obama's support base in the Chicago Jewish community.<sup>3</sup>

Four, former Defence and Home Secretary John (now Lord) Reid, tells the Radio 4 *Today* programme why we must

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1 <[www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/travelnews/8089096/Airport-security-checks-are-completely-redundant-BA-chairman-says.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/travelnews/8089096/Airport-security-checks-are-completely-redundant-BA-chairman-says.html)>

2 <<http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKTRE69R18Z20101028>>

3 <[www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/ct-met-terrorism-scare-synagogues-20101029,0,3874846.story](http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/ct-met-terrorism-scare-synagogues-20101029,0,3874846.story)>

always need money for 'vigilance'.<sup>4</sup>

Then add in the fact that Reid is a consultant to G4S (formerly Group 4 Securicor), the world's largest security company with a big interest in 'homeland security', airport handling and in Israel. (Lord Reid, as well as being a leading advocate of the Iraq invasion and toughness in the 'war on terror', is a longstanding member of Labour Friends of Israel.)

Then turn to *The Shock Doctrine* by Naomi Klein and read this about Israel's economic trajectory in the past five years:

'Much of this growth was due to Israel's savvy positioning of itself as a kind of shopping mall for homeland security technologies.....Israel's pitch to North America and Europe was straightforward: the War on Terror you are just embarking on is one we have been fighting since our birth. Let our high-tech firms and privatized spy companies show you how it's done.'

'It's not an exaggeration to say that the War on Terror industry saved Israel's faltering economy, much as the disaster capitalism complex helped rescue the global stock markets.'

Are all the recent airport scare events just coincidence or cock-up?

## **Prospect and Standpoint**

The new editor of *Prospect*, the *Encounter*-lookalike monthly, is Bronwen Maddox, Rupert Murdoch's former foreign editor at *The Times* and a longstanding member of the British American Project (*Lobsters passim*). The author of *In Defence of America* in 2008, she's a former Kleinwort Benson director and the daughter of author and journalist Brenda Maddox and science writer Sir John Maddox. Two wealthy City financiers

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<sup>4</sup> <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/listen\\_again/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/listen_again/default.stm)>

have the controlling stake in *Prospect*, and even with a senior News Corp executive now at its editorial helm, the magazine still portrays itself as a left of centre publication.

It's 'right-wing' rival, *Standpoint*, is edited by Daniel Johnson. He is the son of one-time *News Statesman* editor turned Thatcherite, Paul Johnson, honoured by George W Bush with the Presidential Medal of Freedom and an attendee at Benjamin Netanyahu's first Jonathan Institute 'anti-terrorism' conference in Jerusalem way back in 1979 (see *Lobster* 47). Short on advertisements but heavy with Israel apologists, *Standpoint* is part of the Social Affairs Unit, itself an offshoot of the Institute for Economic Affairs.

## **Bob's chums**

The row over a BBC World Service item on Sir Bob Geldof and what allegedly happened to some of the money he raised at the time of the Ethiopia famine 25 years ago<sup>5</sup> threw up a few names from the past.

The BBC person at the centre of the row was Martin Plaut, a veteran World Service Africanist. In an earlier life South Africa-born Plaut worked for the Labour Party on international affairs, and in 1984 jointly authored *Spokesman's Power! Black Workers, their Unions and the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*. His co-writers were Denis MacShane, the New Labour MP now known, among other things, for his support of Israel and being investigated by police over his expenses, and David Ward.

Who is David Ward? Like Plaut he worked for the Labour Party many moons ago and was part of the team around Neil Kinnock in the 1980s – mainly Peter Mandelson, Charles Clarke and Patricia Hewitt – who moved the party back into the Atlanticism and nuclear weapons orthodoxy from which it had briefly departed under Michael Foot's leadership. Ward now

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<sup>5</sup> <[www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/04/bbc-bob-geldof-apology](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/04/bbc-bob-geldof-apology)>

works closely with Bernie Ecclestone and Sir Max Mosley on Formula 1 promotion. It was reported by the BBC in 1997 that Ward helped lubricate Ecclestone's controversial £1m donation to New Labour.<sup>6</sup>

Geldof drew much media support from *The Independent* in his BBC battle, in particular from Paul Vallely. The paper's readers were not told that Vallely, created a Companion of St Michael and St George (CMG) during the Tony Blair premiership, was ghost writer of the Geldof autobiography *Is That It?* No critical words about the multimillionaire ex-Boomtown Rat in *Private Eye* either: his Ten Alps media conglomerate runs the *Eye's* advertising.

## **Friends in the North East**

**W**ard's motor racing work brings him into close and regular contact with Alan Donnelly, the man to whom defeated Labour leadership candidate David Miliband wrote his letter about 'stepping back from front-line' politics in September. Donnelly has the double duty of being head of Sovereign Strategy, the lobbying firm that grew rapidly during the New Labour years with Ecclestone as one of its clients, and also of being chair of the constituency Labour Party in South Shields where Miliband Snr. is MP.

In an earlier life Donnelly was leader of the Labour MEPs in the European Parliament and his partner, Peter Power, advised Peter Mandelson both as EU Commissioner for Trade and Gordon Brown's last Business Secretary. It's a small world is North-East New Labour politics, fund-raising and matters of lobbying and business.<sup>7</sup>

## **BP and BAP**

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<sup>6</sup> <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/31866.stm>>

<sup>7</sup> Donnelly with his Sovereign Strategy hat on can be seen at <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7mhSe5bF9A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7mhSe5bF9A)>

**A**n intimate scene, too, when it comes to sorting out student finance. Mandelson, in his third Cabinet incarnation, passed the job of finding ways to fund higher education to Lord Browne, the former head of BP, disgraced when found to be dishonestly defaming his former lover in front of a senior High Court judge. Mandelson's very old Fabian friend Nick Butler spent his career alongside Browne at BP, taking time out to help found the BAP in the mid-80s. Mandelson was an early recruit to that network and Browne a supporter and part-funder of it.

### **Red Ed?**

**A**t the time of writing, I'd seen no mention of the fact that another prominent political figure cut his political teeth as a 'fellow' of the BAP, the new leader of the Labour Party, Ed Miliband. The younger brother spent part of his postgraduate time in the US, along with so many other New Labour neophytes. As mere mention of the BAP has eluded most of the mainstream media since its creation 25 years ago, it came as no surprise to find profiles of the new leader missing his connection with the network in which Paul Wolfowitz and Lord George Robertson were so important.

Nor did I spot any reference to his membership of the same Atlanticist freemasonry in the memoirs of Jonathan Powell, the former diplomat who achieved major influence under New Labour without any previously known party interest or activity. Serialising his book, *The Guardian* did go big on his criticism of Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner John Yates for his investigation into 'cash for honours'.

A leading figure in Yates's sights at that time was Michael (now Lord) Levy. The tennis-playing Labour Friends of Israel (LFI) pal of Blair raised much of the money from 1994 onwards that financed Powell, Alastair Campbell, Anji Hunter and the rest of the high-maintenance team Blair gathered

around him following the death of John Smith. Levy had the post of Middle East 'envoy' at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office during the 2003 war to remove Israel's *bête noire* of the moment, Saddam Hussein. Powell was Blair's chief of staff at the time, Campbell the 45-minute dossier man and Hunter the PM's gatekeeper. She left soon afterwards to join John (Lord) Browne at BP; Campbell's first big job after leaving No 10 was to accompany Lord Levy to speak at a Labour Friends of Israel bash – and Powell now takes a swing at Yates, the man trying to untangle some of the thicket that was New Labour funny money operation on Lord Cashpoint's watch.

## **Wapping wizzards**

**F**ormer LFI chairman James Purnell stood down at the last election and now writes for Rupert Murdoch at *The Times* and is doing PR work for Murdoch's son-in-law Matthew Freud. Wapping is also the new home of Roger Alton, the man who turned *The Observer* into a war-mongering rag ahead of the Iraq invasion. Before editing the paper that had courageously opposed the Suez campaign in 1956, Alton was a stalwart *Guardian* man. After leaving *The Observer*, he took the editor's chair at *The Independent*. He has followed a similar political trajectory to his old friend David Aaronovitch, the man who decries conspiracies but who now is a columnist for the Dirty Digger, none of whose 150-plus titles around the world opposed the Iraq invasion. Coincidence or cock-up, David?

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This essay below is about a third of a recent essay by Bryan Gould on the economic crisis. The other two thirds is somewhat more concerned with New Zealand, where Gould has lived since leaving British politics in 1994.<sup>1</sup>

Before entering British politics, Gould had been a Rhodes Scholar and worked in the Foreign Office. As an MP he was telegenic, had done well in the 1987 election campaign and topped the poll that year for Labour's shadow cabinet. He also understood the British state, economics and, more importantly, economic politics. He rose in the Labour Party at the bow of a wave of thinking in the Party and beyond about the deleterious role of the City on the British economy. This wave included then Labour leader Neil Kinnock, who appointed Gould to chair the Party's key policy review committee on the economy. Gould's committee took the thing seriously, did a lot of research and was about to produce a report on how to rein in the City and support the domestic manufacturing economy, when Kinnock changed his mind in 1988, took the first steps towards accepting that there was no alternative to the established City-dominated economic system, and ignored the committee's work. With the change of line at the top, Gould's star in the party waned as rapidly as it had risen and he left Britain and returned to New Zealand, whence he had come.

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<sup>1</sup> It appeared in *Foreign Control Watchdog* 124, August 2010, which is at [www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/24/04.htm](http://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/24/04.htm) and is reproduced here with their permission.