

Title Tattle

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Blowing the whistle on Dr Fox

Anything written here about the departed Defence Secretary Liam Fox, his best man and unofficial adviser Adam Werritty, Britain's ambassador to Israel Matthew Gould and the Cabinet Secretary Gus O'Donnell is likely to be out of date very quickly. Readers needing a little background could start with Jonathan Cook at Counterpunch¹ and Brian Brady in *The Independent on Sunday*.² Both draw very heavily – and with varying degrees of attribution – on the work of Craig Murray, the former ambassador to Uzbekistan, who is now the highest-level whistleblower to have emerged from the Foreign Office, if not the whole apparatus of British government, in very many years.

Not only is Murray's website³ carrying his own material, it is also drawing some knowledgeable comments – between the inevitable trolls – from those attracted to it.

With the exception of *The Independent on Sunday*, the mainstream media have at this date shied away from the serious substance of Murray's allegations: that a pro-Israeli, neo-con agenda is being run through senior politicians and apparently reaching into the upper reaches of the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence.

Even *Private Eye* seems strangely reluctant to enter these waters. They made brief use of Murray's initial revelations, but not at the depth one could expect given its fine track record on other controversial subjects. This is not to be totally wondered at: when the *Eye's* regular item on newly elected parliamentarians featured neophyte Labour MP

1 <www.counterpunch.org/2011/11/25/is-britain-plotting-with-israel-to-attack-iran/>

2 <www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/liam-fox-adam-werritty-and-the-curious-case-of-our-man-in-tel-aviv-6268640.html>

3 <www.craigmurray.org.uk/>

Luciana Berger, the ex-National Union of Students (NUS) officer who allegedly was romantically close to one of the Blair offspring as well as former New Labour MP Sion Simon, it failed to mention that her previous job had been as director of Labour Friends of Israel.

To date few MPs seem willing to run with Murray's revelations, with Labour's Paul Flynn and Jeremy Corbyn being two exceptions. Even when Liam Fox looked toast, his Labour shadow Jim Murphy seemed reluctant to speak out, leaving most of the work to his junior colleague, Kevan James. Murphy, *Lobster* readers may recall, is a former chair of Labour Friends of Israel.⁴ He cut his teeth in NUS politics and then New Labour with Simon, Stephen Twigg, James Purnell and Lorna Fitzsimons. Fitzsimons lost her seat in 2005 and became head of BICOM (the Britain Israel Communications & Research Centre), the influential London-based Israel lobby. Funding BICOM is Poju Zabludowicz, the man who also contributed to a number of causes close to the hearts of Fox and Werritty.

Philip Gould

Close to the heart of New Labour was Lord Gould, whose death in November at the age of 61 was widely reported as a huge loss to the party. Andy Grice of *The Independent*, a Westminster reporter very close to New Labour people, was fairly typical of the rather OTT coverage – 'A giant in life and death' etc.⁵

The tragedy of an early demise should not, however, blind us to the important role Gould performed in the slow decline of the Labour Party. He held an influential position during the Labour defeats of 1987 and 1992 when his old friend Peter Mandelson was head of the party's communications operation. The much-vaunted success of the 'modernisers' and their gee-whizz techniques in 1997 came on the back of the backbiting European divisions and corruption of the Major government. Subsequent Labour election victories

4 <www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/55188/jim-murphy-labour-still-loves-israel>

5 <www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/tributes-to-philip-gould-a-giant-in-life-and-in-death-6258682.html>

concealed a steady decline in Labour support, both in terms of activism and electoral turnout, leading to the present situation in which a very orthodox and conservative Labour seems incapable of landing a punch on a coalition submerged in political and economic crisis.

Along the way Gould, apparently a rather undistinguished advertising man,⁶ became wealthy, highly influential and a member of the House of Lords. In the obit above we learn that the young Gould worked closely with the daughter of John Gilbert, 'a patrician Labour defence minister who knew absolutely everybody in the defence establishment on both sides of the Atlantic'.

Gould, married to head of Random House, Gail Rebuck, became influential when Labour was committed to unilateral nuclear disarmament and other radical policies. With the help of his focus groups, these quickly disappeared. Then leader Neil Kinnock and his wife, a veteran of Greenham Common, tore up their CND membership cards and embraced orthodoxies on defence, the City and much else, all apparently underwritten by focus group findings.

When Mandelson moved on from Labour HQ to become an MP, his short-lived successor, John Underwood, tried to obtain for the party executive the raw data on which Gould and colleague Deborah Mattinson (*Lobsters passim*) based their strategic recommendations. He failed in the attempt and was quickly succeeded by a more amenable head of communications.

The Hills are alive

That was David Hill, a onetime bagman for Roy Hattersley, who now works for the giant Bell Pottinger PR operation so successfully stung by *The Independent* under its new editor Chris Blackhurst.⁷

Alongside Hill for several years in the company founded

6 www.moreaboutadvertising.com/2011/11/sad-death-of-philip-gould-reminds-us-of-the-days-when-admen-ruled-the-uk-political-world/

7 www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/vicious-dictatorship-which-bell-pottinger-was-prepared-to-do-business-with-6272766.html

by Tim (Lord) Bell, the man who helped make Margaret Thatcher, was Mattinson, Gould's old sidekick in the 'modernisation' of Labour. Hill's partner is Hilary Coffman, who previously worked for Kinnock and Michael Foot.

BAP and the BEEB

Hill's sister, BBC chief editorial adviser Margaret, is a long-standing member of the British American Project (*Lobsters passim*) whose members now seem to fill more and more of the time of the corporation's cash-strapped current affairs output. *Newsnight's* Jeremy Paxman was for many years poster boy on the BAP website (his photograph was recently removed); James Naughtie and Evan Davis now regularly host the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme with frequent BAP guests including David Willetts, Bob Stewart, Ed Miliband and Douglas Alexander. A typical *Today* schedule is likely to contain three or four BAP members, none of whom disclose their membership to the listeners who have funded their extracurricular transatlantic bonding through licence fees or taxes going towards the Foreign Office subventions to the BAP.

Guardianistas

More transparent are the loyalties of Roger Alton to his latest boss, Rupert Murdoch. The 63-year-old executive editor of *The Times* was a key figure in so-called liberal journalism for most of his earlier career. A favourite of former *Guardian* editor Peter Preston, Alton achieved prominence on that title before becoming editor of *The Observer*. The paper that had courageously opposed Suez in 1956 became a champion for the invasion of Iraq under Alton's editorship. From 2008 to 2010 he was editor of *The Independent*. Of late Alton has turned up on television defending News International with an enthusiasm that must make *Guardian*, *Observer* and *Independent* readers wonder what manner of man has been so influential over their news consumption for 30 years.⁸

On the other hand, a senior *Guardian* leader writer and

⁸ See for example <www.youtube.com/watch?v=weUkz6x5k6Q> and <www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWKpyAsKItM>

columnist for many years was Julian Glover. The partner of the ubiquitous Murdoch columnist and former Thatcherite Matthew Parris (he worked for her in No 10 before becoming an MP), Glover has left liberal journalism to work as speechwriter for the Prime Minister David Cameron. James Cameron and John Arlott, turn in your graves.....