

Apocryphilia

Simon Matthews

Like father.....like son?

It was amusing to see Lord Cunningham of Felling (formerly Jack and MP for Copeland 1970-2005) being covertly filmed by a bogus lobbying company some months back. The assured way in which he confirmed his fee, a mere £14k per month, for doing some work for them – basically wire-pulling in the corridors of power, using contacts built up over 40 odd years – would have reminded any observers with a decent political memory of the *modus operandi* of his late father, Alderman Cunningham, also of Felling.¹

On hearing the report in June, the Labour Party immediately withdrew the whip from Cunningham, who duly protested his innocence stating that he had suspicions about the interview he attended and had been 'testing' the veracity of the would be lobbyists by mentioning the £14k per month retainer. Cunningham, who organised the 1992 Labour general election campaign and served as a minister under Blair 1997-1999 (before being reshuffled to the back benches) was the subject of an enquiry by the House of Lords' Committee for Privileges in 2008 about how, precisely, he came to be employed as a public affairs adviser to the City of London Corporation for a fee of £36,000.² Reading it in full, particularly the unravelling of the entrails setting out how Cunningham obtained the position – he was working for Sovereign Strategy, the lobbying company run by Alan Donnelly, formerly MEP for Tyne and Wear 1989-2000 – provides an interesting insight into how some people make their money.

The complaint against Cunningham, from Norman Lamb

1 On Cunningham senior see <<http://lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster62/lob62-shameless.pdf>>

2 See the House of Lords proceedings at <<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldselect/ldprivi/154/154.pdf>>.

MP – for non-declaration of an interest – was dismissed. Cunningham remains an unaffiliated member of the House of Lords.

How is it, towards the East?

For anyone wanting to actively avoid the ludicrous and delusional media overkill of the Thatcher funeral, the Diamond Jubilee and the Royal baby earlier this year, the mixed media exhibition that ran at the Calvert 22 gallery in May-June would have been a welcome relief. Entitled 'How is it, towards the East?', (an enquiry made, apparently, by William Morris in 1890 about East London), the show covered, among other things: the slum clearance, the design and construction of the Boundary Estate by the London County Council in the 1890s; the contribution to UK political debate by socialist, anarchist and communist refugees from Tsarist Russia; 'the validity of certain socialist/Marxist postulates for contemporary society'; a re-enactment of a speech from the film WR – Mysteries of the Organism (a 1971 Yugoslav film about the relationship between socialism and sexuality, focussing on the work of Wilhelm Reich); and how women coped with the cramped domestic circumstances that existed prior to large scale state provision of good quality housing.

All good stuff, but who are Calvert 22?

Their founder, Nonna Materkova, won both a Yeltsin scholarship for Young Russian Business Leaders and a British Council scholarship, and arrived in London in 1999 to study at the LSE. Prior to this she held a number of posts, one of which was Head of Major Investment Projects at the Finance Committee of the City of St Petersburg – in which role it seems reasonable to assume she would have known and met Vladimir Putin, then beginning his rise to global significance in that city. Calvert 22 is sponsored (the exact wording used is 'strategic partner') by VTB Capital, an investment bank, 61% owned by the Russian government. Like any financial institution, the management board of VTB includes a range of personalities but in prominent positions are Andrei Kostin, formerly in 'diplomatic service' at the USSR embassy in London

1985-1990, during which time he presumably knew Alexander Lebedev the current proprietor of *The Evening Standard* and *The Independent*, Vasily Titor, who 'worked in the President's office' in the '90s and Gennadiy Melikyan, previously Minister of Labour in the Russian Federation, 1992-1997. According to Olga Podoinitsya at VTB their role in sponsoring Calvert 22 is 'putting people in touch with the actual trends in the country and offering them a new perspective on Russia'.

It looks rather as if the gallery is a Russian equivalent of the cultural propaganda work carried out abroad by the British Council. How ironic that it staged an exhibition about the values of good housing and 'alternative models of organising society' during the funeral of Margaret Thatcher – the most significant force in the destruction of council housing this country has yet seen. And curious, too, that Calvert 22 is located in the centre of a local authority housing estate, surrounded by blocks of flats housing many immigrant families – not unlike the type of location where Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky and other Russian leftist exiles would have been found during their sojourn in London in 1907.

Finkelstein

Danny Finkelstein, whose personal political journey has taken him from the Labour Party via the SDP to the Conservative Party, made the following (fairly obvious) statement in *The Times* on 12 June: '....Britain wants a US level of taxation with European levels of spending and this is not sustainable....'³ This is true. It is also true that little to no real debate has ever been had about this topic and that mainstream conventional politicians ignore it as an issue. Perhaps, if Finkelstein, an essentially decent and accessible commentator, can broach the subject others might follow? We should hope they do for this is very much the elephant in the room of contemporary UK politics. If not, then society will carry on fracturing; and the

³ A thought echoed by Chris Mullin (Labour MP 1987-2010) in the November issue of *Progress*: 'The British people have been led to believe that they can have west European levels of public services at American rates of taxation'. < www.progressonline.org.uk/magazines/november-2013/>

transformation of Britain into an offshore Europe equivalent of Kansas or Minnesota will continue.

Strange days in North Yorks.....

The passing of Wilf Proudfoot was reported fairly widely and he duly got decent sized obits in most of the quality press. Proudfoot had a respectable political career on the free market right: elected to Scarborough Town Council in 1950; a couple of failed tilts at Westminster before securing Cleveland in Macmillan's 'never had it so good' victory in '59; losing the seat in 1964; returning – in a very close result – as MP for Brighouse and Spensborough in 1970; losing again in '74 as Heath went down to the NUM; and failing thereafter to find a constituency that wanted to select him.

Often overlooked is the fact that, despite not being much of a household name, he got everything he campaigned for. He made his money (and name) in the '40s setting up a chain of prototype self-service supermarkets in Yorkshire⁴ and advocated thereafter the abolition of retail price maintenance, the state regulatory device that fixed the price of a wide range of staples, ensured a level playing field for shoppers and sustained the massive preponderance of small corner shops across the UK. Proudfoot was clear that if this could be done supermarkets would thrive. This was duly enacted in early 1964 by Edward Heath, then President of the Board of Trade in the brief Douglas-Home government.

Proudfoot also had a pronounced interest in decimalisation, thinking perhaps, about the ease of customers checking out from his stores, and the then complicated arithmetic at the till and pockets full of spare change that weighed as much as a bag of flour. The march toward this began in earnest in 1961 when MacMillan set up the Halsbury Committee to enquire and make recommendations on the subject. It reported in 1963, recommending a move to decimalisation, its findings were adopted in 1969 (by the Decimal Currency Act) and Britain went decimal in 1971.

And he also advocated commercial radio. The back story

⁴ See <www.proudfootsupermarkets.com>

to UK pirate radio in the '60s was raked over in *Lobster 58* and *59*, but without Proudfoot's involvement being mentioned. In 1965, with two fellow Scarborough business figures, he promoted a proposal to establish an offshore commercial radio station and convened a public meeting to 'attract investors'. At this he went to some trouble to tell those who attended that the project was not a typical investment and might not yield a return. This suggests that (a) he knew that offshore stations rarely or never made money (b) the purpose of the meeting was to make it look as if it were a 'legitimate' business venture whilst deflecting actual investors; and leads one to the conclusion that the actual purpose of the station was not linked entirely to a personal liking for pop music.

In April 1966 Radio 270, his offshore station, began broadcasting. It cost £75k to launch (£7.5m today) and was accommodated in a Dutch former fishing vessel. The smallest of the UK offshore stations, its operating costs were, like Radio London and Swinging Radio England, underpinned with advertising from the US Evangelists, The Radio Church of God, who paid £300 per week for a nightly slot (£30,000 today).

Just how eclectic its tastes were became apparent in April 1967 when Radio 270 gave up a significant part of its air time to political broadcasts – advocating that people vote Conservative in the May 1967 municipal elections. These broadcasts were made by Patrick Wall MP – who also spoke frequently on air in favour of supporting the Ian Smith government in Rhodesia and the Apartheid regime in South Africa. Harvey Proctor – then chair of York University Conservative Society – hosted a regular 30 minute 'current affairs' programme on Radio 270 throughout May-August 1967. In the final weeks before the Wilson government made offshore broadcasting illegal, Radio 270 carried contributions from Ronald Bell MP and John Biggs-Davison MP in favour of the introduction of commercial radio in the UK.

The story of Radio 270, and Proudfoot's interest in commercial radio, became especially interesting when it

ceased broadcasting. After its personnel dispersed⁵ Proudfoot discussed selling the ship to Radio Caroline's Ronan O'Rahilly, after both Caroline vessels were impounded for non-payment of victualling costs in April 1968. The discussions came to nothing and it was sold for scrap instead; and on the face of it Proudfoot was clearly concentrating on rebooting his political career at this point (having been adopted as Conservative PPC for Brighouse and Spenborough). But was this the end of his dealings with O'Rahilly?

In late '69 two Swiss businessmen purchased and fitted out the biggest and best pirate station yet: Radio North Sea International. It began test transmissions on 23 January 1970 – on a frequency allocated by international agreement to the Czechoslovak government – and from 11 February broadcast regularly across the UK, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland and Germany. Responsibility for jamming the transmissions in the UK fell to John Stonehouse MP, then Postmaster-General, who duly ordered this to be done on 15 April.⁶ The jamming was not particularly effective as RNI changed its frequency from time to time and the station quickly grew in popularity.

On 18 May 1970 prime minister Harold Wilson – comfortably ahead in the polls – called a snap general election. The same day, the owners of Radio North Sea International contacted Ronan O'Rahilly and offered him the use of the ship – for free, apparently – to broadcast and generally orchestrate an anti-Labour campaign. Ronan O'Rahilly has made few comments in the years that followed about his work over the following four weeks but it was extensive: touring marginal seats in a converted double decker bus and distributing a million leaflets urging young

⁵ Philip Hayton became BBC correspondent in Washington DC, moved from there to cover South Africa and Rhodesia in the '70s and later turned up as BBC correspondent in Tehran during the 1979 Islamic Revolution and in Lebanon during the '80s Civil War; Roger Gale became Conservative MP for Thanet North (1983-); Paul Burnett, who had joined Radio 270 from the RAF Broadcasting Service in the Persian Gulf (shades of the late Simon Dee) became a popular DJ on the BBC.

⁶ Stonehouse was the subject of allegations in 1969 that he was a Czech spy. Was the selection of the RNI broadcasting frequency a deliberate attempt to compromise or embarrass him? If so, by whom?

voters to ditch Wilson and go Tory in the name of personal freedom.

Approximately five million electors were aged between 18 and 24 in 1970, about 14% of all those registered to vote. The anti-Labour campaign reached a crescendo on the weekend of Saturday-Sunday 13/14 June 1970 when Radio North Sea International changed its name to Radio Caroline International and staged a rally in Hyde Park, attended by 10,000 and broadcast live on RCI, that ended with a march to Downing Street led by O'Rahilly, Simon Dee and George Lazenby, the latter then the current James Bond. This went virtually unreported in the UK media. Incandescent with rage, Wilson ordered the Post Office to block the RCI signal, this being finally achieved on 17 June (the day before polling) by the use of the most powerful counter transmitter in the British Isles: the Marconi facility at Canewdon, Essex.

Still....with Labour remaining in front in the opinion polls and with the Conservatives requiring a very large number of gains to achieve even a small majority, few predicted the results that trickled in on 18 June 1970 – Heath winning with an overall majority of 30. Labour casualties included George Brown (deputy leader), Sir Dingle Foot (Solicitor General), Anthony Greenwood (Minister of Housing) and a significant number of less prominent personalities – Woodrow Wyatt, Stan Newens, Robert Maxwell, Gwyneth Dunwoody, John Diamond and David Ennals, all of whom were in marginal seats.

A key beneficiary was Wilf Proudfoot, elected in Brighouse and Spenborough with a majority of only 59. Analysis of the 1970 election results shows that the Conservatives gained 18 seats by margins of less than 1,000 votes and a further 15 by between 1,000 and 1,500 votes. In other words Heath's majority was delivered by less than 50,000 electors in 33 constituencies. Another way of looking at it is to say that if 1% of the youth vote in 1970 were sufficiently influenced by O'Rahilly and Radio North Sea International to change their vote from Labour to Conservative – this was enough to remove Wilson from

Downing Street. One wonders who paid for O'Rahilly's activity.

Proudfoot's second spell in Parliament, during which Christine Holman, later Christine Hamilton, was his secretary, saw the passing of the Sound Broadcasting Act (1972) and the setting up of a network of commercial radio stations across the UK, completing the hat trick of major changes to daily life for which he could claim responsibility. Defeated in both the 1974 elections, and not selected for a winnable seat in 1979, he drifted away from politics and embarked on a radically new career as a hypnotist, studying at the Hypnotism and Training Institute in Los Angeles and setting up (in Scarborough) the Proudfoot School of Clinical Hypnosis and Hypnotherapy. He had considerable standing in this field, founding the UK Guild of Hypnotist Examiners who posted, at his death: 'Wilf believed that the most important thing that a therapist could do was give people the experience of trance.'

It is interesting to reflect that, like Sir James Goldsmith, Proudfoot succeeded in achieving carefully defined goals without ever holding high office or, in his case, even being particularly well known. Perhaps a political/social history of Britain might one day be written in which the central narrative is built around people like this rather than the usual procession of prime ministers and other major establishment figures.

Just a few miles along the Yorkshire coast from Scarborough is Whitby, where one Simon Parkes has been making waves recently. Occupying elected office at the lowest rung possible (a town councillor within a district council) Parkes enjoys considerable notoriety as a result of stating that he has been regularly abducted and is in a sexual relationship with an alien with whom he has fathered a child. He is a Labour councillor, for now, and reminds people that from 1994 until 2002 he was also a Labour councillor in Hackney where, he says he used to meet Tony Blair 'quite a lot', and was chauffeured around London in a Rolls Royce meeting international dignitaries, including the US Ambassador. Anyone who was a colleague of Parkes' between

1994 and 1998 would beg to differ. During this period, which was marked by particularly unpleasant internal Labour Party battles, he was most noted by his absence. When he eventually surfaced, and was asked for an explanation he apologised and stated that he had been working undercover, for the security services, in the BNP. Nobody believed him.

Well we wouldn't, would we? And perhaps that's the problem with too many people in UK politics today – so focussed on day to day pragmatic matters! So obsessed with logical explanations! My guess would be that Parkes, following the path trodden by David Icke, will do well on the US abductee circuit....attending solemn conventions, sympathising with fellow victims who will nod at his proximity to Tony Blair and ponder at the involvement of the US Ambassador in his narrative.

Somewhere in a parallel universe Wilf Proudfoot would be giving Simon Parkes regression therapy and retrieving his memories.....

My Old Man's a.....?

Ed Milliband came to Tyneside and addressed the Labour Party faithful at a gala dinner on the evening of 11 October. He spoke well: tough, fluent, slightly self-deprecating. After the usual introductions and name checking of local dignitaries and MPs he reminded the audience that he had just been called a Marxist for suggesting that power companies should have their charges capped and went on to say that if that made him a Marxist, then most people in Britain must be Marxists too, because a clear majority supported this policy. (Huge burst of applause). Running through a list of criticisms of the government, he concluded with an account of his meeting Hetty Bower (at 107, the oldest living Labour Party member) who had regaled him with her recollections of the Battle of Cable Street, and how she had taken part in blocking the attempt by the British Union of Fascists to march through east

London.⁷ Reaching a climax, Milliband told the audience how he too identified with this, and like Hetty, we should reject Coalition policies – specifically any cuts to the NHS and the bedroom tax – proclaiming ‘they shall not pass!’ (Prolonged cheering and a standing ovation.) It was all very different in tone, and even possibly content, to Blair’s relentless suburban centrism and Brown’s calculating use of traditional Labour language to mask overtly free market policies. Even the use of the word Marxist seemed to relax the audience – at last someone speaking in a way that was pleasing and familiar to (most of) the audience, without the obligatory apologising for previous Labour governments or the pretence that everything pre-1994 was an embarrassing aberration.

In keeping with the One Nation-Labour theme Milliband spoke in front of a back drop decorated with Union Jacks; and also, in a nod to US culture, an enormous copy of the Andy Warhol Campbell’s soup tin print (a logo used by the Technology Services Group, a Newcastle IT company and wine sponsors for the evening). Publicity for the event noted that the main sponsor was International Management Partners Limited, two of whose directors are Alan Donnelly (see above in connection with Cunningham (J)) and.....Max Mosley. Multiple ironies abound at this turn of events – Ed Milliband defending his father (‘as any son would’) when Dad was accused of being a Marxist who hated Britain, and Mosley defending his father (‘as any son would’) when Dad, normally accused of being a Fascist who would have betrayed his country, was set on in the street in Hackney in 1962. But Ed Milliband proclaiming ‘they shall not pass’ at an event sponsored by Max Mosley?

Things move on, of course, and children cannot be blamed for the views and opinions of their parents. What is curious, though, is the interest shown by Max Mosley for some

⁷ Mrs Bower has certainly had an eventful political career, not always as an orthodox Labour supporter (which Milliband jocularly admitted in his speech). According to a posting at <www.grahamstevenson.me.uk> ‘She probably joined the Communist Party in the early 1930s.’ Part of her working life at this time was spent at Kino Films – an avant garde documentary company of the period. Presumably she would appreciate the exhibitions staged at Calvert 22.

years in funding the Labour Party; first the Formula One donation in 1997, now this.⁸ One wonders if the future might bring a scion of the Mosley clan being adopted as a Labour PPC, with the family 'returning home' after Sir Oswald marched off in 1931.

⁸ Mosley's contact with Labour go back to at least the mid '90s when Formula One hired David Ward, previously a 'spin doctor' during the John Smith leadership. It appears that Mosley, today, is acting as guarantor for a number of individuals in their libel claims/breach of privacy claims against News International and other sections of the media relating to phone hacking – including, it is said, John Prescott. There is some comment on-line to the effect that Mosley is in regular contact with Tom Watson MP. What do we make of this? Either Mosley is prepared to spend an awful lot of money to curb the press, or he seeks political influence of some kind. Perhaps International Management Partners Ltd are seen by Labour as a source of funding that is independent of the trade unions – as was the donation of £1million from Formula One in 1997, subsequently returned when it became controversial. In a 2011 article in the *Daily Mail* * Tom Bower quoted Formula One's head, Bernie Ecclestone, who donated the £1 million, as saying that in part the donation was made in the hope of boosting Max Mosley's chances of becoming a Labour MP. 'I want Max to be in a good position to get a Labour seat,' Ecclestone said.

* <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1358425/Bernie-Ecclestone-Tony-Blairs-behaviour-rate-played-crooked-hand.html>>